

Throughout 2011, if:book Australia (the Institute for the Future of the Book in Australia) commissioned essays from ten Australian writers on the future of writing and reading in a future tilted towards the digital. Each writer drew on his or her experience in fields diverse as publishing, transmedia, gaming, and comics to observe the changes taking place in 'books' and discussing where this might lead for authors, readers, and reading culture. *High Tech Hand Made* is the result.



Hand Made High Tech



# **Hand Made High Tech**

Essays on the Future of Books and Reading

Simon Groth (Editor)

if:book Australia

**Simon Groth (Editor):**  
Hand Made High Tech

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Day of print:

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# Introduction: Hand Made

if:book is the Institute for the Future of the Book. Based at the Queensland Writers Centre, if:book Australia is part of an international fellowship of organisations that include the original institute in New York, if:book London, and if:lire in Paris. Our role is to promote new forms of digital literature and explore ways to boost connections between readers and writers. To do that, we bring innovations and discussions around book futures to Australia. Crucially, we also take innovations and discussions from Australia to the rest of the world which sometimes forgets about that small but significant English language market tucked away in the southern hemisphere.

Throughout 2011, if:book commissioned a series of essays on the future of books and reading from leading Australian writers and thinkers, people from well beyond what is traditionally considered ‘the publishing industry’. So, alongside editing, publishing, and journalism, this collection explores podcasting, comics, gaming, and transmedia.

We have already radically changed what books are and how we relate to them. The way we make books has evolved dramatically even over the last thirty years. The means by which your average blockbuster thriller is made today (whether in print or digital) would have been inconceivable to early printers. This book, for example, began life as a series of blog posts, then compiled into a publishing platform based on Wordpress, before export in various digital formats and onto your device via the ‘intertubez’.

Exciting things can happen when we combine text with other creative media. Ink and paper do that with images and layouts, but screen-based containers allow for much more. The basic concept of re-flowable text – really an ereader’s primary function – is strange enough in a print-oriented world. And we know digital publishing doesn’t stop there. The world wide web is, in effect, the most radically redesigned publishing platform yet invented, though it has a few drawbacks. It was invented for technical writing on low resolution desktop screens. Remarkably, everything we’ve done with it since – from YouTube to eBay – has been an add-on to that original design.

The convergence of media is a fascinating development in storytelling, but there are more fundamental paradigm-shifting features the world wide web introduced us to. Two of them, in fact.

First is the humble hyperlink. This is the creation that inspired readers to ‘surf’ texts, constructing a sustained narrative not through sustained connection

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with a single author, but by drifting from one idea to another. Many still scoff at the idea that this is ‘reading’ at all and worry that we are losing the ability to engage with deeper ideas. But new skills don’t necessarily supersede older ones. See for yourself. If you’re reading this in the right container, you’re free to follow as many hyperlinks as you like. Maybe you’ll even come back and read more.

Second is implied in the title of this collection. The web is not a broadcast medium; to access it means to participate. By bringing the web’s technology to books and reading, we also import its DIY philosophy. Readers can comment, interact and argue in the margins (or perhaps in the body of the text itself) and anyone can author a work simply by doing it. While the democratisation of publishing tools is exciting and liberating for authors, the resulting deluge of product (and marginal chatter) makes discovery and reading of new works problematic at best and potentially nightmarish. ‘Hand made’ is not necessarily a mark of quality craft. But that’s no reason to decry it. After all, this book is hand made – commissioned, written and compiled by a team of real people – and I think it’s pretty good. So does my mum.

We’re used to the idea of a book as a fixed entity. That’s understandable; we’ve had those fixed entities for a long time. But increasingly we’re compelled to break out of this thinking as books become something bigger: an idea, sustained by prose, refined by editors, supported by data, networked to other texts, augmented by images and other media, and commented on and reviewed by readers. A book is not a petri dish. It is a living thing connected to the wider community.

That’s not a picture of the future by the way. That’s now. The question for readers, writers, and everyone else connected with books is how to capture all the facets of this wider book and how to make the most of it.

This is just the beginning.

## **Note on the Cover Design**

As reading shifts from atoms to bits the materiality of the printed word is lost and replaced with the plasticity of the digital. I thought it would be nice to bring back some of the depth of the printed book into this digital artifact. It also gave me the chance to cut out coloured cardboard for an afternoon instead of spending time in front of a computer screen. That this was done for an organisation and book that pushes the boundaries of what a 'book' can be still amuses me.

Daniel Neville [nevolution.typepad.com](http://nevolution.typepad.com)

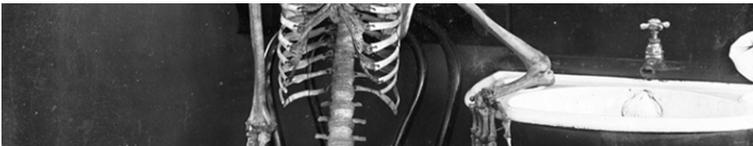


## Chapter 1

# The Living Dead (Sherman Young)

*ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR SHERMAN YOUNG is Associate Dean of Learning and Teaching in the Faculty of Arts at Macquarie University. He is also the Deputy Head of the Department of Media, Music and Cultural Studies, where he teaches new media theory and production. His research focuses on the cultural impact of the new media technologies. Sherman is the author of The Book is Dead, Long Live the Book (UNSW Press 2007) and Media Convergence (Palgrave, 2011). Sherman has a PhD from the University of Queensland, examining Australian online services regulation. He also has a MA (Media, Technology & Law) from Macquarie University and a BSc (Design) from UNSW. Prior to becoming an academic, he ran a multimedia production company producing a variety of multimedia products for corporate and publishing clients.*

Five years is an eternity in the digital age. *The Book is Dead* was published in 2007 (and written in 2006) so it's no surprise that the book world is now dramatically different. Back then, suggesting that the future of books was electronic was pretty provocative. Luckily for me, things unfolded pretty much as I'd expected (or hoped!). While printed books are obviously still around, it's clear that the momentum in publishing (whether it be books, magazines or newspapers) has shifted from paper to screens. Amazon now sells more electronic books than printed ones and almost all the things we used to read on dead trees — from *The New York Times* to *Ulysses* — have migrated to an electronic format. The entire book industry from publishers, through booksellers to readers and writers is in the midst of enormous upheaval — mostly to do with how they might survive in the brave new digital world. Yes, some doomsayers continue to cling grimly to old leather bound editions and scare young children with their gloom, but I think we've reached the tipping point, and ebooks are



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fast becoming normal.

But 2006 *was* a long time ago. Back then, I devoted a chapter to the Sony Reader — which was state of the art at the time — and concluded that we weren't there yet. While Sony tried hard, there was no online ebookstore that resembled the iTunes ecosystem Apple had built around music and so my expectation of a 'heavenly library' was based on hope rather than any inside knowledge that someone would build such a beast. The iTunes store had been around for a while and to me it was a pretty clear model for the future. Sure, there were differences between listening to music and reading books, but I thought the big picture would surely play out the same way: someone was bound to build the iPod/iTunes equivalent in the book space; to me, the efficiencies of digital were irresistible. The unanswered questions were *who* and *when*...

As things turned out, several companies were building the heavenly library. Google's book project was the most visible, provoking as it did an angry response from publishers and authors and so guaranteeing headlines among those versed in arts and letters. But Google Books was more about search and storage than actual reading and the iPod of books emerged from Amazon. The Kindle was the first to combine device and bookstore and turn it into a commercial success. Before the Kindle, there was an unresolved stoush about formats and distribution and the whole ebook environment was a labyrinth that most consumers couldn't be bothered entering — not unlike the mp3 player situation in the late 1990s, prior to the introduction of the iPod. Though it took a couple of years to become an overnight success, Amazon's ereader came to dominate the global ebook market. Yes, there were (and are) viable alternatives, and we still argue about proprietary formats, distribution rights and territories, but the Kindle was the tipping point; it was the device and ecosystem that made it easy for my mother to enter the world of ebooks. For all intents and purposes, Amazon built the heavenly library.

What's more, the Kindle ecosystem brought opportunities for writers as well as readers. By allowing anyone to self-publish into a global distribution network, it legitimised authorship without the need for traditional publishers. Writers such as Amanda Hocking demonstrated that publishing for Kindle was a viable means to access a global market and make real money. Of course, there are relatively few authors who have succeeded on her scale (around 100,000 ebook sales a month, followed by a contract with a traditional publisher), but many authors are embracing the new possibilities. And doing alright.

So, to me, the Kindle and its affordances weren't unexpected. What has proven more interesting is what happened after the Kindle. For me, the iPad (and the iPhone before it) really have changed everything. In some ways, the iPad is an innocuous device. Über-geeks argue that it represents no great breakthrough, and yet, its particular combination of features have paved the way for rethinking some paradigms. The iPad takes a significant step towards making computers invisible; it removes layers of abstraction and allows users to engage directly with what's on the screen in a way which transcends our older ideas about computerised information technologies. And in so doing, it enables a range of new media possibilities.

And while people can, and do, read traditional ebooks on iPads (Amazon's Kindle titles work perfectly) the true significance of the iPad is that (unlike the Kindle) it is capable of much more than replicating the print-on-paper experience. The iPad and its peers represent a future where we habitually use a portable, lightweight screen to do a plethora of everyday things: watching videos, surfing the web, playing games, making music, and reading all manner of content. And that range of activities enables new thinking to emerge.

Apple's iBookstore may not achieve the sales success of Amazon's Kindle store, but its App Store points to a range of new possibilities for books. Of course, there will always be a place for long-form texts and the possibilities of the digital realm re-energise old-fashioned reading and writing. But the activity in the App space suggests that, as well as recreating the paper-based long-form text, authors, publishers and readers are rethinking the very idea of what books can be. Add in the further blurring of roles as media consumers discover the ease with which they too can be producers and what emerges is genuine excitement in form of the experiments with enhanced books, reinvigorated notions of multimedia and the increasing convergence of books, games and video. And, intriguingly, it is in the App Store that economic innovation is also occurring. While remediating print publications in the form of traditional ebooks still struggle with legacy pricing regimes, App Store titles like Al Gore's *Our Choice*, which blur the boundaries of all media forms, are a tenth the price of their print equivalents.

Of course while Kindles and iPads are now an accepted part of our media environment, their use is by no means universal. There are many, many people who still refuse to countenance the idea of electronic books. Some of them are readers. And, for very good reasons, book publishers sometimes seem to struggle to embrace the electronic way. Book publishing emerged in an analogue age, with profitability dependent on managing scarcity. The ebook ecosystem, built on internet technologies (as so much media currently is) simply has no respect for the constraints on which the book industry has traditionally made its profit. So, it's no surprise that redirecting the business culture of book publishers to meet different consumer expectations is a challenge. This is obvious in the local context where the range of available Australian titles is still far from comprehensive; a situation not helped by a territorial copyright approach that made absolute sense in the age of sailing ships but seems archaic to any digital sensibility.

Despite this, the future is clear. We'll be reading on screens, downloading books over the internet, discovering new writing in interesting new ways and engaging with things we call books, but which will incorporate possibilities we are only just beginning to imagine. Five years on, the book is still dead. Long live the book.



## Chapter 2

### Moving On (Peter Donoughue)

*PETER DONOUGHUE retired from the publishing industry in March 2009, after a 35 year career in the Australian book trade. His last position was Managing Director of John Wiley and Sons Australia Ltd, a role he held for 16 years. He held numerous industry positions during his career, including President of the Australian Publishers Association (1996/1997), and a Director of CAL (1993-2003). After retirement he set up a small consultancy operation to offer advice and support to a range of Australian publishers, booksellers and wholesalers, and established a blog Pub Date Critical ([peterdonoughue.blogspot.com](http://peterdonoughue.blogspot.com)) through which he regularly comments on and debates industry issues and concerns.*

Over the last twelve to eighteen months the debate over the future of the book has moved through a number of stages. We initially focused on ebook devices and their features, functionalities and sales volumes, particularly when the iPad first appeared; we then moved onto DRM, ‘windowing’ and ebook pricing; then to agency and other supply models; then, when it became obvious that retailers were suffering, onto the critical role of high street booksellers and whether they’d survive and what impact on an emerging ebook industry their possible demise would have.

Now we’re at the stage of debating the role of publishers and not just their role, but whether, in a thoroughly digital future, they’d even exist. Would they not be exposed as analogue relics, rooted to the legacy business models of print, and soon to be cast aside by the inexorable march of digital progress?

‘The entire publishing industry is going down the drain,’ according to an executive from Siemens at the World E-Reading Congress in London in early May.



‘Publishing is not dead. It’s more like Wile E. Coyote in the moment before he notices the cliff has dropped away beneath him,’ tweeted Australian author James Bradley on 11 May 2011.

The panel discussion on *Jennifer Byrne Presents: Future of the Book* on the ABC on 17 May 2011 was telling because it signalled how thoroughly we’ve all now moved on to a much more mature reflection on the issues. It concerned the future of publishing and whether one should be optimistic or pessimistic about the radical, structural shifts taking place in the industry that could well mean the demise of the familiar behemoths that have ruled the book world since Gutenberg.

And then there are the recent, very meaningful, moves by one of the ‘new’ behemoths – Amazon, Apple and Google. Amazon has thrown a cat amongst the pigeons by setting up a number of publishing imprints and hiring an experienced publishing professional to build its own list. Whether this will be a successful financial venture for Amazon is not the point. The fact that they have chosen to do it is the point.

Literary agents, author associations, and many authors themselves have not been slow to register their frustration over the seemingly inflexible, unresponsive and defensive corporate manoeuvres from the big publishers, and many of them are voting with their feet and striking out on their own to best position themselves for the digital future.

I find it fascinating, if not a little sad, that it’s come to this. But publishers really have no-one to blame but themselves.

Humility is not a virtue usually associated with publishers, particularly the majors (frequently referred to as ‘the big six’). Arrogance, yes, but not its usual opposite. The problem is that today, in the midst of a profound digital transition, with outcomes and endpoints intrinsically unknowable and barely amenable to forecasting, arrogance is a habit of mind that publishers need to quickly shed or they will die. When that arrogance is combined with fear, as it always is, it becomes toxic indeed.

Let’s review some of publishing’s wrong moves over the last few years:

It was wrong to respond to Amazon’s aggressive ebook pricing with the Agency model of supply, thus guaranteeing higher and uncompetitive prices. This was a distinctly pro-producer, anti-consumer move as its effect was to disallow consumer-tested pricing at the very birth of a new and exciting industry product.

It was wrong to bind the new e-tailer behemoths to geographic, territorial restrictions by contract, thus denying non-US consumers access to tens of thousands of important new titles upon their first release (there are far better and consumer-friendly ways of dealing with territorial rights sales).

It was wrong to impose on authors a maximum royalty of 25% of net receipts on ebook sales. (35% plus is far more justified).

In Australia, publishers were wrong to oppose the abolition of our parallel importation restrictions which serve to protect publisher over-pricing and under-servicing in our local market (this issue never had anything to do with territorial

copyright, but that was the way publishers framed it – very successfully unfortunately).

Australian publishers are wrong to continue over-pricing when the Australian dollar is so strong against the US dollar and UK pound. And they are wrong to argue that the GST should be foisted on booklovers – their customers – if they chose to order online (publishers need to be hyper-responsive to consumer sentiment, and dramatically lower prices accordingly to keep faith).

These are only some of the ways publishers, globally and locally, have and are reacting to new, emerging paradigms – with fear, defensiveness, arrogance and protectionist sentiment. It is not the way into the future.

But the simple fact is that publishers are terrified, as are most businesses, of the digital future – perhaps not visions of that future, but the ugly, messy, transitional process of getting there. For they are being required to submit themselves and their organisations to a radical process of refinement, akin to jumping head first into a giant threshing machine, and trusting they'll emerge alive, pared down to their essence, and thoroughly renewed.

All the analogue baggage of the print business that made them powerful players – marketing and sales machines, distribution might, wholesale/retail connections – all this has to be shed, perhaps slowly, perhaps quickly, but certainly painfully. This amounts to losing 20-30% or more of current overheads, and many staff.

What will remain is the pared down, distilled essence of publishing that most publishers today have long forgone, forgotten, and always outsourced – editorial.

Over the decades, under the pressure of mergers, acquisitions, restructurings, and downsizings, when Big Retail has squeezed margins to the thinnest imaginable, our standards as publishers have been lowered. Our regard for the quality of the text has too frequently been off our radar screen. Our respect for the old, intense, creative relationships; the old skills and craft of recognising, developing and editing talented authors; the ancient role of challenging, clarifying, re-writing, querying, red-lining and binning. We've been absent, cold and unsupportive.

Perhaps I'm naive in thinking that this serious, collaborative, sympathetic profession of editing will be re-born as the core of publishing. But I do know this: people are sick to death of unedited prose – the knotty, clotted, jargon-infested illiterate bilge that clogs our time and space. How refreshing and joyous it is to read clear, lucid, beautifully balanced sentences that sing and instantly communicate. And how powerful it is to be moved and spiritually expanded by stories brilliantly told.

Unless publishers rediscover this essence of what publishing is all about they will have little to offer and will certainly be squeezed out of the value equation.

But if they do, and if they bring all their design, production, marketing, metadata, administrative and management skills to the ancient process of 'making public' the words and ideas of the best of the best amongst us, then they deserve to, and certainly will, flourish.



## Chapter 3

### You're the Voice (Ryan Paine)

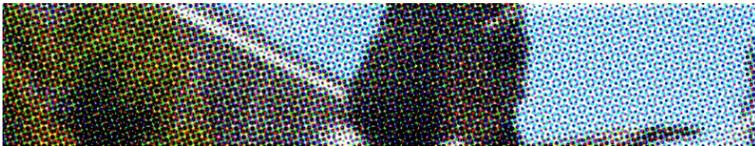
*RYAN PAINE, a former editor of Voiceworks, has worked as a book editor at Wakefield Press in Adelaide, was Director of Format Festival's Academy of Words, also in Adelaide, and has had book reviews published in The Big Issue, Australian Book Review and on Radio National's The Book Show. He has had stories and essays published in various places of low repute but high quality, has many friends in low places with lofty ideas about a new world order, but is currently learning how to stop worrying and start living in South-east Asia. Hit him up if you're in the neighbourhood.*

There was a time, kids, back in nineteen tickety two, when people sincerely believed in the internet as the great democratising power of the twenty-first century. I, for one, thought it was the Second Coming of the Gutenberg Revolution. But then I'm one of the most naive and optimistic people I know. Gullible maybe. Whatever.

Now, in only nineteen tickety three, this promise has gone the way of ... well, democracy itself. Just as a concentration of third-estate power has occurred in Thomas Carlyle's esteemed fourth estate, control of the online knowledge market is coagulating in the cloyingly, sickeningly sweet hands of our dear friend Google.

Sure, there are others (alternatives), but only in the same sense there are alternatives to News Ltd and Fairfax in Australia's traditional media industry: they're nominal alternatives, with no real power. Running a successful, independent newspaper in Australia would be much like going into farming against Monsanto in the United States.

The book-industry implications for this trend first dawned on me when I



found another puff piece about cultural criticism, this time in the *Guardian*: 'Is the age of the critic over?' Puff piece or not, the precis really got to me:

Critics reflect on how social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and myDigg, fit into the perennial debate on cultural elitism.

### **How Long Can we Look at Each Other?**

It's that phrase 'cultural elitism' that worries me.

I had a bit of a freak out around the time I read this article, when a couple of sinister-looking Web 3.0 technologies burst into my corner of the internet: Google's Priority Inbox, which sorts your email, and a creepy website called voyURL, a site that turns your browser history into a public timeline much like Twitter's (if that gets up it will be in the hands of Google in no time).

With their fancy algorithm, Google will continue scanning all this data and selling it to advertisers, who will feed us back an approximation of our existing taste, further enabling our predilection for confirmation bias and empowering groups with already significant market share to dominate the advertising feed we consume according to that bias. Information will be delivered to us in the same way: Google even enables you to block results from particular URLs.

This is bound to lead to a concentration of market share and power, and the big guys will muscle out the small producers. Just as Monsanto has muscled out all the small farmers. The book-industry implications of these developments in technology scare the bejebus out of me.

If, in their fight with Google for a monopoly, Amazon gain an ascendancy in the production and distribution of literature to the same extent News Ltd has gained control of the world's news media, our literature will go the way of our journalism: as meat goes to domesticated dogs – cheap, nasty and homogenised.

This technology was supposed to free us from niche cultural elitism *and* monopoly power, not exacerbate them. But we're becoming trapped by this technology and, as Eli Pariser recently reiterated for us, it might be that this technology is actually making us more stupid – less discerning. This tweet I found puts it well, replete with characteristic grammatical errors: 'Your google search is curated, which isolates you into bubble & narrow world view.'

The book trade is already geared to service the interests of the few bestsellers published by the few big publishers, just as the agricultural industry is geared by Monsanto for Monsanto. Some of the literature produced in these upper echelons of the publishing industry is great (thought-provoking, challenging, progressive, entertaining, beautifully written, artful, delightful), but many big publishers are pedalling tripe (boring, generic, conservative, woefully written, artless, not delightful at all).

Small producers are producing artful literature, which is important for aesthetic reasons I always have trouble articulating, but you wouldn't be reading this if you didn't know those already. The industry importance is clear: these houses are bringing in the new crop – risking it on new talent, developing our future producers. Even this sector is a niche though, with its cliques, elites and cloisters. It's upsetting, then, you might agree, that the first great enabler of

democracy since Gutenberg has begun to fuck out within a couple of years of it beginning to come of age.

When it grew up, the internet was going to take the power and responsibility of cultural discernment out of the hands of the few big publishers and 'the critics' of the *Guardian's* article (the cultural gatekeepers) and into the hands of the small press. Good criticism would move online. There was that whole thing about the long tail. But until at least its balls drop, the internet will continue passing that power into yet another set of hands.

Hang on. There I go again: using the present continuous tense, as though the internet were a sentient being, with free will and therefore the ability to *do* anything. All of these developments are contingent on us, on *our* will and *our* actions. The internet will not set us free, because it does not have free will.

These are not new ideas: I just want to reiterate that we (individuals) are responsible for democracy in all its forms, from governance to culture.

The moment we think we're off the hook because some clever bugger has come up with a harebrained doovalacky that cures cultural elitism is the moment we roll over and take it, the moment we accept our governments bombing the shit out of third-world countries in the name of ... yep, there's that word again: democracy. The moment we defer responsibility for our literary culture to a machine we're all fucked, because literature helps us to understand how to live well in the world – how to stop fighting and start loving.

Maybe I'm being naive again, but I reckon we can harness our power as consumers to enable the broad dissemination of recommendations, that golden goose of books marketing: word of mouth. Even if Amazon doesn't go Monsanto on our arses, rolling over to Google's 'intuitive' recommendations leaves us at risk of cloistering ourselves into inescapable niches.

We must speak now or forever hold our peace: if you let the elites and the established publishers take over those niches and don't look elsewhere to stock your to-be-read towers, or start making your own literature, you lose the right to bitch about the Miles Franklin Award.

### **Musical Interlude**

You're the voice, try and understand it  
Make a noise and make it clear  
Oh-o-o-o, whoa-o-o-o! We're not gonna sit in silence  
We're not gonna live with fear  
Oh-o-o-o, whoa-o-o-o!

[Instrumental: Bag pipes and tin whistle.]

[Choral Prelude]

[Weird guitar sound? *Bwow* ...]

[Repeat chorus until end of song.]

'*You're the Voice*', John Farnham

What Farnsey says is true: you're the voice. So, where's this voice? In your: wallet, search engine, feed reader, pen, mouth, keyboard, etc.

Buy from independent retailers, who are generally more discerning about quality. Research publishers and consider buying directly from them if you like what they're doing. Or order their titles through your indie store if you want to support booksellers. Avoid buying loss-leaders. Buy classics second hand and

contemporary literature new. Buy your friends' novels, at least. Don't torrent books.

Find and read lit blogs covering books that don't get much fun from the corporate media. Sort out the wheat from the chaff. Tell people about great books you've found. Buy new books for Book Crossing. Review literature you like on blogs, or write Amazon reviews if you want to ride that bully. Share this essay. Go direct to the source: produce your own literature; Salt Publishing is soliciting recommendations of writers – nominate someone. Tell them who you want to read. Nominate yourself.

The internet will not do it for you.

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## Chapter 4

# In the Service of Crowds: Writing in Public (John Birmingham)

*JOHN BIRMINGHAM is a Brisbane based author, blogger and journalist. He files for a wide range of magazines and newspapers and writes for publishers in Australia, America, the UK and Europe.*

As with so many things in my public life, I fell into Twitter by accident. Having lunch with a friend who was a bit of a social media guru long before we all thought of ourselves as social media gurus, I was told to get onto Twitter and grab up my name before somebody else did. Good advice, as it turned out. Within a couple of weeks of the registering my account as @JohnBirmingham, a fake John Birmingham had also registered.

I was kinda chuffed, identity theft being the sincerest form of flattery. But unfortunately fake John Birmingham's tweets petered out, buried by an avalanche of my own. I quickly became entranced with Twitter, partly as a time waster and partly because of its potential to amplify the buzz we're all desperate to create in the two or three weeks after a book first appears on the shelves. Twitter, it seemed to me, was word-of-mouth raised to the power of lots and lots.

It was also very obviously a trap for the naïve and the coldly calculating. The conversational nature of Twitter – indeed of all social media – seems almost perfectly fashioned to lead people into saying things they really shouldn't in public. Like Facebook, the micro-blogging service combines both intimacy and immediacy in a way that can lead the unwary to forget that they're actually talking to the whole world. At the other end of the scale there are those spivs and pimps who are only too aware of the potential for monetizing our online



conversations but who are, unfortunately for them, clueless and incapable of restraining their slobbering desire to cash in on this potential. Why anybody selling marginal real estate in Florida would imagine I'd want my screen filled up with their screeching advertorial is beyond me. But they do, and every day more and more of these gimps follow me in the hope that I will follow them back and respond to their latest offer to get suckered into a really shitty deal on Gulf Coast waterfront.

It is possible, however, to use social media without coming on as an amphetamine-crazed greed head in a hallucinogenically loud plaid jacket or a fallen Nigerian cabinet minister with access to unexplained funds that could be remitted into your bank account this very afternoon, were you to trust him with your wallet and PIN number.

It's not for everyone though. If you're going to do social media, you have to be genuine about it. That doesn't mean you can't go online to hawk your wares, but the defining characteristic of social media is that it is social, not commercial. If you want people to take an interest in you, unless you are a mega-celebrity, you will need to take an interest in them, which means actually following the conversations, occasionally contributing to them, and not drowning them out with a wall of sound composed of nothing but sales announcements.

Some authors, such as Tara Moss and Nick Earls, have sussed this out long ago. Some booksellers like Avid Reader too. It's easier for the individuals, rather than the companies, to attract attentive followers of course, but Avid also benefits from connected staff members such as Krissy Kneen who will tweet 'around' and 'about' the bookstore in an even more personal fashion.

For me, the benefits of investing some time and attention to building up a reasonable following on both Twitter and Facebook (I update the latter via the former) came well before my last book was published. For six months while on deadline I posted daily updates of progress, sometimes challenging all comers to a race to see who could reach, say, two thousand words for the day first. It was surprisingly motivating and bracing to kick the arses of would be writers and English students every day. Indeed some days, it was all I had to keep me at the keyboard.

I also threw research queries out to my followers. This allowed them to invest in the project long before they could lay hands on the book itself. It also meant I spent much less time trawling the net for arcana such as descriptions of locations I needed for scenes. For example, unable to find a reliable image or description of the third floor of New York's Plaza Hotel before it was renovated, I turned my dilemma over to Twitter. Within an hour I had photographs of the hotel from the time period I requested. One reader even scanned a news story about the reno, including before and after shots, and posted it on Twitpic for me.

Boylan: I really like the idea of displaced Americans trying to hold onto a little bit of "America" because it requires a definition of what it means to be "American" and that isn't as easy as it is to find commonalities that define other cultures. I am hoping that John can fill the role, at least in part, that de Tocqueville did. We are not

well suited to analyze ourselves. That requires someone from the outside looking in able to describe what they see.

In the week of my *After America* tour when I started to announce dates and venues and invite my tweetenvolk along. I was curious to see what if any effect this had on numbers. The turn outs were much larger, the number of sales greater, and the events themselves much more fun than previous tours. Over the course of the week I estimated that a couple of hundred extra people attended and bought books, than would have otherwise been the case.

Now, in terms of mass market numbers, a couple of hundred extra attendees, while good for the individual bookstores, won't make a big difference to me or PanMacmillan at the end of financial year. But the amplifying effect of social media isn't restricted to simply getting people out of their living rooms. A good number of those who come push word of the event and the book out through their own online networks, either as tweets, blogs, Facebook posts or whatever. This is word of mouth broadcast at a much greater volume than was previously possible. It won't replace traditional media and marketing strategies, but it does have the potential to greatly improve them.

Finally, lest this should all sound horribly cynical and calculating, I should reiterate that it's also a helluva lot of fun, especially when the virtual 'meet ups' in the real. Rather than a room full of strangers, awkwardly circling each other, most people who turned up on my last tour 'knew' at least some of the other punters, even if they had never met in the real world. It made for a celebratory atmosphere which, again, can only add to the buzz. On the downside, it did mean more hangovers and an increased Berocca bill.

Blogging was my first foray into managing my relationship with my readers independent of my publishing company. But I didn't do it, not originally anyway, simply as a marketing exercise. I started blogging because having become a full-time, professional writer, I needed an outlet for storytelling that wasn't related to paying my mortgage or my taxes.

It was a reader called Steve Murphy who got me into it. He had written a review of my first thriller, *Weapons of Choice*, on his blog. He liked the book, liked it a lot in fact, but had picked up a couple of errors I made when using military terminology. If you are the sort of writer who bristles at being corrected by 'amateurs' like this, you need to get over yourself. I thanked Murph for reading the book so closely, and offering his critique, and I had my publishers correct the errors in the next edition. It was a win for everybody.

Having benefited from that brief foray into the blogosphere, I decided to linger. Setting up my own blog I used it at first as something of a diary, simply recording my days work routine, and occasionally discussing the business of writing. I think I attracted a hard-core following of maybe, oh I don't know, a dozen or so regular readers in the first few months. This was despite having books that have sold hundreds of thousands of copies. It was the early days of blogging.

Very quickly, I realised that being online was a way to stay in contact with readers between books and across the vast distances which often separated us. So I kept at it, even though in the early days it really was for a very small

audience. I believe it was years of tapping away at my blog, of building real friendships with the people who turned up there, that prepared me well when I later moved on to Twitter and Facebook.

Having been online for many years, it was easy to make the transition to those formats, but you need to be aware that people will see right through you if you enter those forums intending to use them as nothing but a marketing tool. It's just painfully, awfully obvious.

So how do you do it?

As sincerely as possible.

Let's look at Twitter, because for me Twitter has become something of an engine room. I use it for both my publishing and mass media work. In doing that, I follow a lot of other writers and journalists. Some of them really understand the nature of Twitter. Some don't.

It is, first and foremost, a conversation. Not a public address system. For myself, I believe that if someone is kind enough to follow you on Twitter good manners demands you follow them back. Unless they are a crazy stalker, or selling underwater real estate in Florida. I have plenty of both among my 12,000 'followers'.

If you expect people to follow you, to attend to your every witless twit, and they will, you have to give something back. And that something is not an opportunity for them to simply buy your stuff or turn up at your next gig. When you have decided to engage directly with an audience, you owe them your attention.

Of course there is a trap in this. And it's not just the obvious one of making yourself a target for crazy people. As you build up your following it can become entirely distracting, so bad in fact that you never write another book again because you spend all of your time reading and writing fucking tweets.

If I had one piece of advice to offer it would be to rigorously control the amount of time you spend on social media. It can be an incredibly powerful tool, but it can also be a bottomless time sink. You might want to think about allotting 15 or 20 minutes at the start and end of the day to invest in your online presence.

And after that, you turn them off and go back to writing.

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## Chapter 5

### The Golden Era (Bronwen Clune)

*BRONWEN CLUNE is founder and CEO of Norg Media, a company dedicated to creating people-powered news sites around the world. Bronwen launched Norg in 2006 with what she says was a very 'green' outlook on how the web worked. Not one to sit on the sidelines and very much in awe of the changes she saw it bringing to media, she wanted to explore that for herself. After somewhat of an epiphany and an intense few months of idea-jamming, she launched her vision for a future news organisation.*

There were days when the Red Crescent was begging for volunteers to help in taking the bodies of dead people off the city street and bury them properly. The hospital grounds have been turned to burial grounds [sic]...

It was in 2003 that a fascination with the possibilities of a new contribution to journalism was born for me out of the words of Salam al-Janabi, known to all his readers at the time as Salem Pax. Salam was an English speaking blogger whose blog *Where is Raed?* became a testament to the limitations of traditional ways of reporting and revealed the possibilities that online publishing tools brought to journalism. Each day, I couldn't log on to the internet fast enough, dial-up screeching my impatience, to see what had happened overnight. I was fixated. And excited.

Disquiet had begun settling on reports coming out of Iraq; questions were emerging on online forums about US government motives and the information being fed to audiences by *The New York Times*. And then there was Salam writing a blog for his friend Raed about what was going on during the invasion of Iraq: sometimes eloquent, sometimes observational, sometimes clumsily written, but always compelling. It was an insight into a situation that might have



reached a limited audience months later, but online it reached a mass audience as it happened.

Subsequently, it was revealed that reports filed by Judith Miller for *The New York Times* about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction, often quoting unnamed US officials as sources, appeared to be fabricated. Whether this was deliberate or not has not yet been fully established. A front-page article of Miller's that reported Iraq had 'stepped up its quest for nuclear weapons and... embarked on a worldwide hunt for materials to make an atomic bomb' was cited by Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell and Donald Rumsfeld as reasons to go to war, a report later proven to be false.

In a poetic full-circle, Salam landed up writing for *The Guardian*, which also published a book based on *Where is Raed?* under the title *The Baghdad Blog*. That's not to say that his posts were to be viewed without question; there were many questions at the time, as there should have been. In the beginning, Salam was writing under a pseudonym and it wasn't until May 2003 that *The Guardian* tracked him down and verified his identity.

But this isn't a story about the death of traditional news organisations or even their perceived political biases, but rather the moment where the impact of a single blogger made a lot of people sit up and notice a powerful shift in news distribution.

Dan Gillmor, technology writer and author of *We the Media*, called this the end of 'big media', which 'treated news as a lecture'. Tomorrow's news reporting, he said, would be more of a conversation than a seminar. The London bombings confirmed this news evolution for many. Helen Boaden, BBC director of News, saw her newsroom inundated with pictures only minutes after the bombing. 'The long -predicted democratisation of media had become a reality, as ordinary members of the public turned photographers and reporters,' she said.

Fast forward to 2011. I was captivated, like many, by the recent events in Egypt. Late one night I came across the stream of a twitterer going by the handle @bloggerseif. I think I found his tweets from Andy Carvin of National Public Radio, who did an amazing job of creating a 'curated' twitter stream of all that was going on. That's another story in itself. But that night, it was Ali Seif's tweets that made the whole situation real for me. In the chaos of the night, his often disjointed and emotive tweets, told the story of a small child they found; lost among the chaos in Tehran square. They had no way of knowing if the baby's parents were alive, or even who he was. I think he could only say his name. I was captivated. Amazingly, they located the child's parents the next day. It was hugely emotional to read, but I felt like I had some insight (and empathy!) to the bigger picture through the live and raw tweets of Ali Sief and the plight of this lost child that would otherwise be overwhelmed by the revolution around them.

These days, we almost take the changes in news reporting for granted. But what has become glaringly obvious is that the media is not dying. It's flourishing. At no other time in history have we had access to so much information. And we are creating it at an amazing rate. According to Eric Schmidt, executive chairman of Google, every two days we create as much information as we did

from the dawn of civilization up until 2003. In digital terms that's something like five exabytes of data. And it's early days.

With this evolution has come a new set of challenges. How do we sort through all this information? How do media companies survive? Can they adapt at a rate fast enough to keep up with the erosion of their business model? How do we keep public interest journalism in the forefront of the day's news when the news cycle has shrunk and important issues fleet in and out in a day? George Megalogenis, in 'Trivial Pursuit: Leadership and the end of the reform era', his *Quarterly Essay* from 2010, says: 'There is no tolerance for a long argument anymore because the public has been taught that every new day carries the promise of a blizzard of unique content.' This highlights the next problem: payment. News is, after all, a short-term commodity. The question of whether people will pay for online news is still pretty untested, but I do think there is a working model in there somewhere. The New York Times Co. for example, turned a third-quarter profit and now has 324,000 paid digital subscribers, after launching their paywall in March 2011.

So, there is light. News organisations, often large corporate entities, have needed to learn how to experiment and respond to their audience at a scale and speed they have never had to before. By and large, though, they are trying. In Australia, a recent collaboration between a grassroots site *Our Say* that asks people to vote on issues they see as important and *The Age*, saw readers vote for questions they wanted answered on climate change. The top questions were then investigated and reported back to *The Age* audience.

Media companies are just not able to take their audience for granted any longer. An increase in competition has meant they're under greater pressure to create compelling content; a better-connected audience has meant that they cannot get away with mistakes and fabrications; better communication through social networks like Twitter has meant journalists are 'on the ground' where the audience is. These are all great things for news and I'd say, despite all the challenges, we are in the golden era of journalism.

We are no longer confined by necessities like printing presses or media licenses to participate in news creation. You don't need to understand HTML or any technical aspects to publish news to an audience. While journalists working in media companies have been traditionally resistant to these changes, more and more are embracing social media, mostly because it's hard to deny its importance as a tool, both as a form of news publication and news gathering.

Ultimately, the news is good for news.



## Chapter 6

# Poetry in the (Digital) Wilds (Jason Nelson)

*Born from the Oklahoma flatlands of farmers and spring thunderstorms, JASON NELSON stumbled into creating awkward and wondrous digital poems and interactive stories of odd lives, building confounding art games and all manner of curious digital creatures. Currently he professes Net Art and Electronic Literature at Australia's Griffith University in the Gold Coast's contradictory shores. Aside from coaxing his students into breaking, playing and morphing their creativity with all manner of technologies, he exhibits widely in galleries and journals, with work featured around globe at FILE, ACM, LEA, ISEA, SIGGRAPH, ELO and dozens of other acronyms. There are awards to list (Paris Biennale Media Poetry Prize), organizational boards he frequents (Australia Council Literature Board), and numerous other accolades (Webby Award), but in the web-based realm where his work resides, Jason is most proud of the millions of visitors his artwork/digital poetry portal attracts each year.*

The digital landscape is comprised of lines, tendril connections between events and objects, moments (past, future, present) and ideas. The field of digital poetry is driven less by mountains of accepted theories and practices than by the intersections of the artist/poet's life and their expression of those experiences through experimental and nearly unclassifiable digital creations. Digital poetry began as – and continues to be – a wild and lawless land. There are no clear rules, no dominant conventions, no semi-agreed-upon canon of “great works”, not even a clear definition for the slim entry fields of grant proposals.

Indeed, in 2008, the Electronic Literature Organization put forward a project with the United States Federal Archives who were collecting websites to spider



(web bots) and archive in the national collection. Many digital writers were upset with this 'canon building' activity, fearing this sweep of websites might be the only digital writing future aliens and/or archivists would ever know. The archive went forward, but it was clear despite decades of digital literature production, there continued to be a strong resistance to 'pinning down' the genre. This story speaks to two common traits of the digital poet. First, they are typically mavericks, cowboys of the poetry/digital art world. And yet most have no desire to become pioneers, to lay roots and build towns, as they are quite satisfied with the occasional job rounding up code and/or fighting those greedy mine owners who want to tame hypertext. And second, these electronic verse makers are continually riding the ever-changing gusts of technology, their practices bending, swaying and almost always breaking during spring storms. Even the term group, in the great cowboy tradition, only fits during weekends at the Saloon after some wayward academic conference.

Yes there are, to continue beating the western theme, the clerks, pulp novel historians, theorists and railroad barons bred books, conferences and dissertations on the genre. And eventually the barbed wire fences and criss-cross of highways might force these wanderers into burgeoning suburbs, to backyard gardens and the occasional horse ride into the wilderness. Compared to poetry in general, or any other literary field, digital poetry and its larger brother/sister Electronic Literature is a small frontier land, comprised of an incredibly diverse and spread out, but sparse population of writers/artists and scholars both academic and independent.

Strangely, the number of people creating digital poems has not increased dramatically in the past ten years and yet the scholarship around the works has grown substantially. Anecdotally, conversations with fellow digital poets might suggest that, as the attempts to package digital poetry by theorists increase, the playground atmosphere seeps away, diminishing the experimental base of the genre. Digital poetry currently exists in a strange space, a borderland between legitimacy and passing fad. I do not pretend to understand all the nuances and factors that might lead this genre to its future success or eventual disappearance. A first step though is to explore what digital poetry is, to attempt to uncover a definition of the genre.

Defining digital poetry is not about clarity, nor is it concerned with easily identified creative products. Instead, digital poetry is more of a continually changing process, a way of translating the world, and more about intentions than intentionally fitting into categories. So how does one define a genre, certainly one so new and ever changing as digital poetry? Because there is no overall consensus on the matter, I will attempt to identify commonalities and, combined with my own understanding of the field, create a baseline description for digital poetry. This 'compiled' description is a diving board, a portable ladder, a box of coloured pencils/paper, a stick of non-toxic craft glue and the description built will be elusive, ever changing and defiant.

Digital poetry, as old as computers, is still more the subject of special editions and collected works, rather than the broad acceptance of filtering into everyday language of the literary/arts world. Brazilian academic Jorge

Luiz Antonio provides an almost sarcastically long list of terms for what comprises the genre, nearly all combining some technical descriptor with the word poetry. For example there is Hypermedia poetry, Click Poetry, Kinetic Poetry, Internet Poetry, and perhaps the most technically broad and accurate of them all Computer Poetry coined by Théo Lutz in 1959. At the end of this list (and before) he even apologizes for not being exhaustive. While it appears his intention is to provide a historical context for the field's development. Instead what seems to be arising is a field unwilling to define itself, as if the true term was some impossible to pronounce string of hypens, hypers and all manner of grammatical gymnastics.

Poet Stephanie Strickland has written many treatises attempting to define, and redefine digital poetry. Her article 'Writing the Virtual: Eleven Dimensions of E-Poetry', puts forth a self-admitted contradiction. Although she provides us with eleven states E-Poetry typically inhabits, she concedes that 'Writing native to the electronic environment is under continual construction (poiesis) by its creators and receivers.' What we are left with are eleven laws for a lawless land. Specifically, such statements as the 11th – 'Soft ephemeral space in any number of dimensions is created and disassembled or dispersed inside an overall default situation of hybrid states of mixed reality' – are both inspiring to the writer and yet so open ended as to suggest the goal of E-Poetry is to recreate the cosmos, to rebuild the micro/macroverses around/inside of us. Here digital poetry seems less a classification, and more its own language, relearned and changed by each new speaker.

Lori Emerson, in Leonardo Electronic Almanac's special issue on digital poetry adds to the argument defining E-Poetry. And while others like Strickland are happy to swim in ethereal language, Emerson sees a danger in the murkiness. She argues, 'While we have to acknowledge digital poetry as part of our current cultural moment, this acknowledgment is doomed to vagueness as long as we cannot say what digital poems are let alone adequately describe their behaviour.' In attempting to address this doomsday scenario, she attempts to pin some of digital poetry to the 'mathematicization of space', and 'poems reflecting thinking that is based on either Euclidean or non-Euclidean principles of mathematics'. As we see with other definitions or partial attempts to pin down digital poetry, Emerson is also correct. Digital Literature requires an intimate engagement with numbers, equations and geometry. But is this just restating Stephanie Strickland's point? If the world, as some would argue, is born from and moves to the beat of maths, then again Digital Poetry becomes the foggy, near spiritual engagement with the our real and created universe. Metaphysics is often used to classify that which we cannot or will not define.

But should we even separate digital poetry from its print counterpart, defining it as anything but simply poetry? Poet Majorie Perloff, in a chapter from *New Media Poetics: Contexts, Technotexts, and Theories*, asserts 'no medium or technique of production can in itself give the poet (or other kind of artist) the inspiration or imagination to produce works of art'. Digital poets have a fetish for the trickery of technology, but the content of their poetry, the inspiration behind their artistry is not tied to digital magic acts. It comes from the play

between the poet's internal and external worlds. In concluding her point Majorie quotes Bill Viola:

‘I don’t like the label “video artist”,’ the great video artist Bill Viola, once remarked. ‘I consider myself to be an artist. I happen to use video because I live in the last part of the twentieth century, and the medium of video (or television) is clearly the most relevant visual art form in contemporary life.’

And certainly interactive technologies are for digital poets what video is to Viola, another albeit more complicated and dynamic pen and paper set, new tools for an old art.

Where we arrive, after this brief survey is an understanding that digital poetry defies, it seems, the traditional notion of classification. Perhaps this is due to the perceived youth or newness of the genre causing a ‘let’s wait and see what happens’ attitude among practitioners and theorists. Or maybe it’s the way digital poetry uses the tools of and borrows from so many other art and literary fields. A digital poet must be website maker, games creator, video artist, programmer, painter, musician, interactive designer and wordsmith. And with each new change in technology, so too goes the digital poet: today a net-artist and tomorrow an iPhone developer. Indeed the anti-defining attitude the genre so brazenly wears is as important a component of any digital poetry definition as the multimedia tools it inhabits.

As for my work, I find classification is sometimes more determined by the opportunity than specific intent. Internally, I might think of my work as digital poems. But externally, when I describe my work for the purpose of submitting to exhibition calls or to be published in journals or applying for grants, I fluctuate to emphasise the aspect of the work that most neatly fits the submission call’s description. This might be considered ‘cheating’ or wishy-washy opportunism by some. And at times that criticism might be correct, as I’ve been guilty of de-emphasising the poetics in my work for the chance at large visual arts grant. However, I would also argue that my flexibility is pulled/coaxed/harvested from the very core of digital poetry. Again as Strickland stresses, digital poetry is its own ever-evolving language of all the texts available, electric and otherwise. Entirely vague and problematic? Of course. Exciting and adventurous, chaotically building and destroying meaning and convention? Thank heavens, yes. Absolutely and anti-absolutely, yes.

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## Chapter 7

# A Less Lonely Pursuit (Myke Bartlett)

*MYKE BARTLETT is a freelance journalist, emerging novelist and veteran podcaster. His work has appeared in publications such as Metro, Dumbo Feather and The Age newspaper. Currently, he earns a crust reviewing cultural things for Melbourne glossy The Weekly Review. Over the last few years his podcasted fiction has been downloaded more than half a million times. In 2011, he won the Text Prize for his young adult novel The Relic, which will be published in August 2012.*

Writing is a lonely pursuit. As a full-time writer, I spend most of my days sat alone with the blinds drawn, pretending the dog is interested in my observations. Still, this is the career I've dreamed about since I was far too young to consider any career that wasn't 'Ghostbuster' or 'adventuring archaeologist'.

Strangely, I never really worried that I couldn't write, but I did worry the stories I was telling wouldn't appeal to the arbiters of the publishing world. Another podcaster, J.C. Hutchins once said something similar: 'If I based my opinion of my work solely on the reaction of agents, then the work was shit, and I didn't think it was.' Maybe that was why I never sent any chapters off to publishers or agents, fearing rejection was inevitable. If only there was some way of side-stepping the slush pile and connecting directly with an audience.

When I bought my first modem in 2000 (yes, that late), I immediately became excited about the possibility of finding that audience online. Without knowing what I was doing, I built myself a website and posted chapters of a book I was writing, week by week. By the book's end I had about three readers, but that was encouragement enough to finish. Four years later, ensconced in a particularly dull office job, I blogged another novel, *Electricity*. This time I doubled my readership, but felt no closer to the big time.



Podcasting – the posting of mp3 files in an RSS feed – seemed a far more alluring prospect. In 2006, *Podiobooks.com* was opening for business and looking for submissions, so I recorded the first three chapters of a new project (I had only written four chapters) and duly sent them off. It was perfect timing. When the site launched, my novel *How to Disappear Completely* sat proudly on the front page.

At the time, I was spending three hours a day staring out a train window. Armed with a laptop, I was able to use this commuting time to write and edit a chapter a week, which I would then record and post on the weekend. It was, to be honest, a disastrous working model. Real life ate up my time and I frequently hit a brick wall in my ill-planned plot. Often I wished I could abandon the whole project.

The problem was, I now had an audience. Whereas I had enough fingers for each of my previous readers, my new audience numbered in the thousands. If I missed a deadline, angry emails arrived, demanding more. It's hard to think of a better incentive for a wannabe novelist than furious impatience. The book would be finished, whether I liked it or not.

Feedback was immediate and largely positive. I soon noticed that I started to reshape the narrative in response to the likes and dislikes of my listeners. Most notably, I realised I had a tendency as a writer towards the 'downward spiral', in which characters rarely triumph for long. It's a plot shape familiar to Australian fiction, one which Louis Nowra identified as the guilty party in an article pondering the unpopularity of Aussie film.

One of the reasons that podcasting had appealed was the ability to move outside the local market. *How to Disappear Completely* wasn't set in Australia (although it did feature an Australian protagonist) and seemed, to me, a poor fit for the local literary scene. Sure enough, the majority of listeners came from the US, where the hero narrative – as explicated by the likes of Joseph Campbell and Robert McKee – rules all. In connecting directly with an overseas audience, I had inadvertently exposed the parochial nature of my plotting. Despite being convinced my stories didn't belong in my national canon I was, after everything, an Australian writer.

In response to this feedback, I wrote a chapter in which the characters began acting more heroically and the praise immediately poured in. As the book progressed, the writing process became increasingly interactive, as I became more aware of which characters were finding favour and, perhaps crucially, what listeners really wanted from my story. Some listeners sent me artwork depicting the protagonists as they saw them, some sent me money, one kindly offered to build me a proper website (which he continues to manage). Their interest, generosity and loyalty was astonishing – certainly more comforting to a writer than a letterbox full of rejection letters. Suddenly, writing seemed a far less lonely pursuit.

However, the end goal, as with every other podcast novelist, had always been publication. Podnovelist pioneer Scott Sigler had used his fan-base to propel himself into the bestseller lists and other authors were finding once-closed doors now left ajar. I had approaches from two agents, both of whom were based in

the US, and began dialogues about how the podcasted first draft could make it onto bookshelves. At around the same time, I turned down a publishing offer from an American small press, who wanted to more or less print the podcast as it stood, flaws and all.

I was certainly aware that a massive amount of restructuring was required. Having written the book as an episodic narrative – with each episode requiring a certain amount of action, intrigue and forward motion – I was faced with the task of teasing out a story that would make sense on the page. One of the agents – quite rightly – balked at the amount of effort required, while the other spent more than two years reshaping the book, only to lose her job at the crucial moment.

As it stands, *How to Disappear Completely* has notched up around half a million downloads and regularly breached the US iTunes Top 10. It's certainly not the biggest hitter in the podosphere, partly as I've been reluctant to engage with the kind of relentless promotion and grandstanding required to woo and maintain a larger audience. An online audience, many of whom feel they are essentially 'getting in early', can be extraordinarily loyal, but they also want to be reassured – perhaps as your work lacks the publishing industry's stamp of approval – that they're on to a good thing. As a writer who tends towards self-deprecation (I've had angry emails demanding I stop underselling myself), I've never felt comfortable telling the world how awesome I am, several times a day.

Five years on, I've come to feel podcasting is a flawed model for side-stepping the slushpile. Undoubtedly, some publishers have found themselves won over by authors already armed with a readership and, certainly, an author who can manage his own marketing is an alluring prospect. For most podnovelists, however, a publishing contract remains elusive. Many, myself included, have experimented with publishing-on-demand, as a means of capitalising on the audience base we've accumulated. Most have found it a good way to make pocket money, if not a career.

In my case, after five years of podcasting, I ultimately found a publishing contract by more traditional means. I entered a new novel, currently titled *The Relic*, in an annual prize run by Melbourne's Text Publishing and was fortunate enough to see the book win. It's the first time I've kept a first draft to myself, using the entry deadline as incentive, rather than a swelling inbox.

The worth of podcasting a novel is something that, in the end, might mean little to your bank account. Of more value is the window it opens in your dark room, allowing a writer to communicate with a waiting audience while still hammering away at the keyboard. What other method of publishing allows a novelist workshop a first draft with thousands of readers, scattered across the globe? For myself, the process has been about building confidence as much as refining my art. There is, it seems, an audience out there for every kind of tale – even if, as yet, they remain ignored by the publishing industry.

**Reference**

Louis Nowra, 'Nowhere Near Hollywood', *The Monthly*, December 2009-January 2010, <http://www.themonthly.com.au/film-louis-nowra-nowhere-near-hollywood-preview-australian-film-2178>, accessed 12 July 2011.

## Chapter 8

# Comic Book Publishing in the Digital Age (Jackie Ryan)

*JACKIE RYAN is the writer, director and designer of Burger Force comics. In between being consumed by Burger Force, she has devised and directed a number of short films and music videos. Some of these have won awards. Jackie's film work can be seen at [jackieryan.net](http://jackieryan.net). Burger Force comics live at [burgerforce.com](http://burgerforce.com).*

I can't draw. There was a time when this would have been something of an impediment to the DIY production of a comic book. I'm also not rich, famous, connected, a creative team, a publishing house or a marketing department. I do, however, have a camera, a computer, a graphics tablet, an internet connection and the Adobe Creative Suite. *Burger Force* comics are brought to you by the democratisation of technology in the digital age.





*Burger Force* is the story of a pop culture detective agency located beneath a

fast food restaurant. To avoid drawing it, I have combined film and photography techniques with sequential art storytelling to bring you the world's first professionally cast comic.

The equipment at my disposal – even in my relatively impoverished state – is favoured by many of the stars of ‘the big two’ (Marvel and DC). To produce an issue of *Burger Force*, I take photographs of real people and places then transform those photographs into line art via Photoshop. I design the pages and add fonts in Illustrator then assemble those pages in InDesign. From this point I produce a flash file to upload to the website at burgerforce.com and a pdf that I email to my printing company. It is feasible to produce a physical copy of *Burger Force* courtesy of advances in digital printing and the subsequent affordability of a small press run. [1]

Accessible and affordable technology has removed so many of the hurdles to comic book production that a number of owner/creators are eschewing, even leaving, traditional publishers. Eisner nominated writer Alex de Campi is one of many comic creators turning to crowdfunding platforms such as Kickstarter to produce their projects. Her reasons:

The new thing with comics publishers is not giving any page rate or artist support for creator-owned work, but demanding 50% ownership of everything. I think that's really crap, and won't publish through anyone who does that. I hate having to beg for money in public, but I hate more shifting 50% of my rights to some folks for the privilege of them making the call to the printers instead of us. [2]

Scott Kurtz, of *PvP* webcomic fame, expressed similar sentiments when announcing his decision to leave Image Comics:

...I now do all pre-production on the books myself. All Image really does for me at this point is [send] it to the printer. So every time I print a collection and do most of the heavy lifting when it comes to sales of the book, Image still gets a fee and Diamond still gets a hefty cut despite not working at all for the benefit of the book as far as sales in stores go. [3]

Monopoly comics distributor Diamond is the long term nemesis of comic book publishers, pocketing up to 60% of the cover price of a comic. Publishers who make individual arrangements with stores can negotiate that to a more civil 20-40%. Those offering direct sales from their website have only their payment provider to satisfy.

Diamond is currently facing a strong challenge to its distribution hegemony in the form of digital comic sales. Comic publishers have experimented with micro-payments, subscriptions and digital downloads for some time, but the advent of iOS devices such as the iPad and iPhone is truly changing the distribution landscape. Sales of digital comics increased over 1000% in 2010. [4] The dominant digital distribution platform, ComiXology, was the second highest grossing iPad application at the time of writing. [5]

Digital sales have several advantages over print for comic book publishers. Production costs are lower, distribution is simple and the comics have a much



longer shelf life. Digital distribution options for independent publishers include Google Books, Apple iBooks, Amazon's Kindle Fire, Scribd and the Mac App store (at an average cost of 30% of the cover price). [6] Those unwilling to part with 30% of the cover price can sell downloads of their comics direct from their website.

The appeal of digital comics to consumers is clear. The shops are always open, they never run out of stock and the comic shop guy isn't going to question their choices. Rare and previously out of print publications can be accessed with a few clicks and they don't take up much space or start to smell. Digital distribution platforms such as Graphic.ly have sought to further the appeal of digital comics by offering bonus content such as commentary tracks and a feature that allows users to remove the colour from a comic and inspect the inks beneath. [7] Graphic.ly has also attempted to mimic the 'community experience' of a comic shop by incorporating discussion boards and user recommendations on their site.

The rise in popularity of digital comics is a concern for brick and mortar comic stores but it doesn't necessarily herald the end of printed comics. Some comics don't translate as seamlessly to digital as music, movies, and text-based books. There are certain paper and design aesthetics that are better appreciated in print. Collectors will still want their signed, limited editions and variant covers along with the potential to resell their collection at a profit. They also want genuine ownership.

Unlike digital purchases of movie and music files, customers do not own the digital comics they have bought from most publishers. They have merely purchased the right to view them on a licensed device. As the comics are often in proprietary formats, the customer's ability to view their purchase exists only

as long as the platform is in operation. In many cases, the customer must also be online to view their purchase. Digital is, nevertheless, the only growth area in comic sales.

No single-issue title exceeded 100,000 in print sales in August of 2011. [8] This is a steep decline from the 1960s when popular titles exceeded 1,000,000 in sales. [9] Digital comics, 'trade waiters', the global financial crisis and the closure of physical comic stores (along with the demise of comic friendly chains like Borders) are all factors in the decline of printed comic sales. [10] Piracy is another. Scanned copies of most comics can be found on pirate sites hours after official release. As with other forms of piracy, examples can be found in support of 'piracy as promotion', but publishers are yet to be convinced of piracy's charms. [11]

In a bid to deter piracy, comic publishers have banded together to shut down pirate sites such as Htmlcomics. They have also been forced to provide appealing legal alternatives, including the shift to 'day and date' publishing, whereby comics can be downloaded digitally the day they are released in stores. Publishers such as Marvel and DC are also experimenting with including free (or discounted) digital versions of a comic with the purchase of a physical copy.

With even the pirates pitching in, marketing is relatively easy and affordable in the age of Web 2.0. Budget friendly online marketing/ fan-relationship-building tools include facebook, twitter, forums and blogs. Ryan North of 'Dinosaur Comics' and his associates used social media with such aplomb that their 'Dinosaur Comics' inspired anthology, *Machine of Death*, debuted at #1 on the Amazon best seller list. [12] The charmingly chaotic webcomic *Axe Cop* went viral days after appearing online, the website receiving nearly 750,000



unique visits within the month. [13] When heroic marketing feats such as this can be achieved independently, owner/creators have further incentive to question the economic sense of handing a large slice of the profits and a cut of the merchandising to a publisher.

With marketing easier and cheaper than ever before it's important to have an angle to stand out from the rapidly expanding crowd. *Burger Force* has one, incidentally. Some of the best looking people in the world are in this thing. They also happen to be very, very good at what they do. Members of the cast frequently appear in major theatrical productions around Australia and in the performance groups Polytoxic and Briefs. Basically, it's a comic with very good acting. But the real innovation? It's now less creepy than ever before to have a crush on a comic book character. Maybe you really will meet one of the stars of *Burger Force* and fall in love. You should probably buy a copy and get started on that journey. How about a t-shirt?

Merchandising and IPR are frequently more profitable for comic publishers than actual comic sales. Most publishers offer merchandise on their websites or through nerd-friendly online stores like Topatoco. At the top end of town, film and television adaptations of properties such as *Thor*, *Scott Pilgrim Vs the World* and *The Walking Dead* have spawned video games, action figures, soundtracks and more. Even when the film is a box office disappointment, the flow on effects for comic sales and associated merchandise can be significant.

So how does a comic make money in the absence of Hollywood or viral success? My strategy, which isn't for everyone, is not to try. I make *Burger Force* available for free online and the margins are very tight on the physical copies. I figure the most important thing at this stage is for people to be aware that it exists. If they don't have to pay for it, they might read it. If they read it,



they might like it. Word of mouth is a significant part of my advertising budget. It may not always be this way. I rather hope it isn't. I have deferred fees and residuals to pay.

One of the advantages of being small is that you are nimble. As an owner/creator in the digital age, I can make changes to the website, the availability of the comics and my marketing strategy with relative ease. Should *Burger Force* become an overnight sensation a few years from now, I imagine I'll negotiate that with some combination of a camera, a computer, a graphics tablet, an internet connection and the Adobe Creative Suite.

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### Cast

Lisa Fa'alafi as ORIANA Janis McGavin as ALEX Yalin Ozucelik as MERCURY Remy Hii as COLE Mark Whittaker as FANCY JAMES Leah Shelton as CILLA

### References and Notes

[1] I have explored Print on Demand options, but the pricing is generally higher and the quality less consistent.

[2] <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/10/27/alex-de-campi-ashes-film-rights-kickstarter-publishing/>. Image is one of the few comic publishers that does not demand partial ownership of creator owned projects in return for publication.

[3] <http://www.comicsbeat.com/2010/07/14/pvp-leaves-image-for-self-publishing/>





[4] <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2010/12/28/biggest-comic-books-news-2010/#>

[5] Early September, 2011. <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2011/09/09/comixology-charts-as-the-2nd-top-grossing-ipad-app/#>. ComiXology offers content from over 40 publishers including Marvel and DC. The company is currently developing a kit that will allow independent publishers to be included on their platform (at the cost of 35% of the cover price). Other online distributors will presumably follow suit.

[6] Until recently, e-readers have not been popular with comic publishers due to poorer screen display and, in some cases, digital delivery fees per megabyte that penalise graphic file sizes (in addition to charging 35% of the cover price). <http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/digital/content-and-e-books/article/46244-kindle-we-have-a-problem-amazon-s-pricing-policies-affect-publishers-.html>. Amazon is seeking to plug this gap in its market by shipping the (7" colour screen) Kindle Fire with comiXology preinstalled.

[7] <http://couch.graphicly.com/post/968280875/the-super-sonic-tuesday-update>. Graphic.ly is the second largest digital comics distributor behind ComiXology.

[8] <http://www.icv2.com/articles/news/18352.html>

[9] <http://www.comichron.com/yearlycomicssales/1960s/1960.html>

[10] As the term suggests, 'Trade waiters' wait for comics to be collected into trade paperbacks rather than collecting single issues, or 'floppies'.

[11] The creators of the spelunking comic *Underground* saw a massive spike in their website stats and etsy sales after the comic was illegally posted on *4chan*. This dwarfed the spike in their stats when the comic was promoted on the popular blog *Boing Boing*. [http://www.undergroundthecomix.com/4chan\\_thread\\_20614483.html](http://www.undergroundthecomix.com/4chan_thread_20614483.html). See also: <http://www.comicsalliance.com/2010/10/22/underground-4chan-steve-lieber-sales-pirated-scans/#>

[12] <http://machineofdeath.net/about>

[13] <http://axecop.com/index.php/achome/story/>

## Chapter 9

# What Can We Say with Games? (Paul Callaghan)

*PAUL CALLAGHAN is a freelance writer and independent game developer who has worked in the games industry since 1998 as a programmer, designer, writer, and teacher. He has spoken about writing for games, play, what education can learn from game development, and the fundamentals of game design at the National Screenwriters' Conference, GCAP, VITTA, TEDxMelbourne, the Emerging Writers' Festival, the State Library of Victoria, Screen Australia, ACMI, CAE, and RMIT. His writing on games, play, and storytelling has appeared online at if:book Australia, Kill Your Darlings, ibrary, The Edge, and The Australia Council for the Arts, and in print in the Emerging Writers' Festival Reader, Newswrite, Storyline, and Meanjin. He is also the director of the Freeplay Independent Games Festival, a yearly event looking at the cultural and artistic side of games, and has written award-winning short-stories, short films, comics, too many articles to count, and is currently working on a novel.*

*I suppose earlier generations had to sit through all this huffing and puffing with the invention of television, the phone, cinema, radio, the car, the bicycle, printing, the wheel and so on, but you would think we would learn the way these things work, which is this:*

- 1. everything that's already in the world when you're born is just normal;*
- 2. anything that gets invented between then and before you turn thirty is incredibly exciting and creative and with any luck you can make a career out of it;*



3. *anything that gets invented after you're thirty is against the natural order of things and the beginning of the end of civilisation as we know it until it's been around for about ten years when it gradually turns out to be alright really.*

*How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet, Douglas Adams*

Somebody born in 1980, when videogames first began to appear in people's homes in the form of the Atari 2600 or the ZX Spectrum, has never known a world without videogames. As a result, on the one hand we have adults on the cusp of the above stage 1 and 2 who have grown up with games as essential parts of the cultural fabric and who want to explore its creative possibilities, and on the other we have those in stage 3 who cry that videogames are the latest demons sent to corrupt our children, destroy their learning, and reduce our own clearly unstable civilisation to a pile of dusty rubble and glowing ash, leaving a generation able only to twitch with brute Pavlovian responses to flickering lights and random acts of senseless violence.

Luckily, the end of the world isn't a particularly interesting conversation. What is interesting though is what lies at the root of it: this worry that the *outsider* is dangerous because it is so different to what has come before. Differences are great, but they only exist if you're able to define them within the context of some sort of similarity – even if you choose to ignore it – and it's here that we find the deep vein that gives us a much more interesting conversation about what games can teach us about themselves, about storytelling, about art and humanity, and about the wide range of human experience.

All communication – and all art – is built on the necessity of taking some aspect of the world, codifying it, and presenting it in some way that enables another mind to grasp it. This abstraction gives us a way of saying this thing over here shares some characteristic that might be useful or interesting or beautiful with this other thing over there – the metaphor, although not necessarily in its well understood realm of rhetoric and language, but in its conceptual metaphorical form that allow our brains to map what we know of one realm into another. And whether its encoded as words or brushstrokes or musical notes, all forms share this underlying need for metaphor because it is fundamental to how we communicate, and it's from this simple idea we have everything from the great works of art to the avant-garde, from the expansive crowd-pleasing to the unmarketable but deeply personal.

Games are no exception to this rule, and their building blocks of the conceptual metaphor for games is in how they encode systems of rules, variables, and goals that encourage behaviours and actions within the game's world. From a simple game like tic-tac-toe where the ruleset is small, the world simple, and the interactions between players is limited, all the way to something like chess with a more complex ruleset but still a simple world, and highly emergent interactions between players, all games are built out of these essential building blocks, as are sports, video games, single player card-games, multi-player role-playing games, and live action games.

But in addition, there is something that takes the conceptual metaphor a little bit further, something that isn't entirely essential, but something that has existed as long as games have, acting as both a catalyst for their creation and a fundamental aspect of their presentation – the use of fiction, the use of metaphor in its rhetorical form.

Games have always contained some element of fiction designed to make the rules clearer or to help with the transfer of the lessons learned into the real world. Chess survives with its story of kings and queens protected by knights and bishops and the easily disposable pawns in defensive rows before them. Soccer began as a form of military training with a player trying to get the ball into a small basket while being assaulted on all sides, useful skills for a foot-soldier in some long-running campaign. Theories about the genesis of Go include it being a tool for divination, as a way for an emperor teaching discipline to one of his children, or as an ancient fortune-telling device. While some of these games have lost the weight of their metaphorical elements, there is no doubt that they were there at their inception and that metaphor and fiction have played a key aspect in creating the games we see around us every day, including contemporary videogames.

But there must be something different in videogames that sets them apart, otherwise these non-digital games would be a billion-dollar industry and an ever-present threat to our civilisation. Again, we find the answer not in the differences, but in the similarities to what has come before.

The significant shift that technology gave games has little to do with the graphics or the input technology, nor is it necessarily part of the maturation of the form – it is something far more fundamental in how we experience play and storytelling, and that is that we far more easily connect and engage with experiences that are conversational and continuous.

Before video games came along, the interaction between player and game was staccato. Players would make a move, then wait for other players or the result of a dice roll or sit in contemplation of their next move. By contrast, someone reading a novel flows through the story in an unbroken line of moments, action and reaction. Watching a play or a movie, the audience is carried along with the immutable 'presentness' of it all. Wandering through an art-gallery is both an unbroken temporal and a physical experience. Games were rarely like that until technology came along and turned the interaction between player and rules, between states and world, into the same form of continual conversation that our storytelling forms have enjoyed for centuries.

This conversation gives the storytellers of today and the storytellers of tomorrow a new tool to play with and, as we learn what we can *do* with games, the next question becomes: what can we *say* with games. And future storytellers will be richer, not poorer, for that shift. Where some see the loss of the written word, of storytelling, of their way of life, others see a new way of being, of expressing themselves, of building new art; where some see the loss of imagined worlds, others see the possibility of newly realised ones; where some see what it takes away, others see what it adds; where some see only the differences, others see the similarities, and between all of those extremes lies the truth – and the

opportunity to get in on the ground floor as we move into a new wave of an art-form. Why would any creative pass an opportunity like that up?

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### **Reference**

- How to Stop Worrying and Learn to Love the Internet, Douglas Adams  
<http://www.douglasadams.com/dna/19990901-00-a.html>

## Chapter 10

# Do You Have a Big Stick? (Christy Dena)

*Christy Dena is Director of Universe Creation 101, where she is currently writing, designing and directing a web-driven comedy-drama called AUTHENTIC IN ALL CAPS. She works as an experience designer and writer on transmedia projects, and has consulted on multiple films, TV shows, alternate reality games and performance projects around the world. Christy co-wrote the Writer's Guide to Making a Digital Living, wrote the first PhD on transmedia, and curated Transmedia Victoria.*

Can I write across media? Yes and no. No, I can't begin writing a sentence with a pen on paper and then use that pen to write on a screen. I have to change my tools. But, I can use those different tools to write a story that begins in paper and ends on the screen. At its most fundamental level, this is transmedia. Transmedia is not synonymous with digital media as it often involves *both* digital and non-digital media. A transmedia writer is also not synonymous with writers who write both screenplays and novels. Instead, transmedia often involves the continuation of a story across media.

Right, now that these crucial details are out of the way we can proceed. I lie. There is another important point to make. This article is not about how transmedia affects the publishing industry. There are plenty of discussions about that, and some of these are footnoted at the end of this essay. The focus of this essay (finally!), is about writing transmedia projects. For, without understanding the skills involved in this area, no industry will be affected. No amount of commissions or funding will support this area without the talent to execute it.

This essay addresses four of the key approaches that have emerged so



far in transmedia writing. They represent areas of expertise and therefore opportunities for writers. The first two approaches are types of transmedia projects. Transmedia always involves multiple distinct media (such as a film, TV show, book, play, and so on), but how they are combined is what sets them apart from each other. The first transmedia type is, in simple terms, a **collection of mono-medium stories (what I call intracompositional in my thesis)**. The most accessible example of this is what is commonly known as a ‘franchise,’ where a book, film and perhaps a console game all contribute distinct stories to one overarching ‘storyworld’. A pre-transmedia paradigm could describe such projects as involving a writer team working on a screenplay, for instance, and another working on the novel – with one medium usually being the most important and the others tertiary – and the stories are often adaptations, not continuations. Important differences to note now is that stories are often continued across media, can involve the same writer teams, and undergo careful continuity controls. In the transmedia context, all of the stories in each medium are seen as equal contributors to the meaning of the overall storyworld. Writers in demand at this level, therefore, are able to work in more than one medium and are equally on par with each other.

The second transmedia type is a **collection of media that tells one story**. For instance, a two-screen entertainment project where the audience is meant to shift their attention between a TV show and a website. Another example is a story distributed across the internet, where characters have multiple websites, social media accounts, interact through email and may even publish a newsletter. While the first transmedia type is often designed to have a self-contained story per medium, without the necessity to engage with all of them, the second transmedia type is usually designed to have a reader, audience member or player consume all of the media elements to understand a single story. These types of projects require a writer to not only be adept at the media being utilised above their understanding of storytelling in general, but also how to guide their audience from one media point to the next. This is where an understanding of interactivity — the province of first-generation hypertext and CD-ROM writers and contemporary game writers — is an essential skill.

The next two approaches to transmedia storytelling can be described as the timing of a transmedia project: when it becomes a transmedia storyworld. The most common skill writers (or editors) are employed to do in type-one transmedia projects (multiple self-contained stories on multiple media) is an **expansion analysis**. This occurs when someone has already created a novel, film, TV show, game or play, and they subsequently want to expand it; they want to make it transmedia. It is an extension of an existing mono-medium story that can be described as **retroactive transmedia**. An expansion analysis involves establishing the entire history of the characters and settings presented already and determining what is essential to the storyworld, what is secondary, and what areas haven’t been explored yet (such as a sub-character, possible prequel or sequel, and so on). These tasks culminate in the creation of a transmedia bible. Like a TV show bible, this document outlines all the essential elements that make up the world: characters, plots, style, themes, design, props, settings.

Writers then draw on this continuity guide to ensure any expansion perpetuates rather than contradicts the rules of the world (or at the advanced level can happily and cleverly progress them).

The expansion of an existing mono-medium story has its pitfalls. The obvious reason being that the original story was designed to be self-contained and often conclusive. An example of this is Steven Spielberg's film *A.I. Artificial Intelligence*. It had an apocalyptic ending that did not lend itself to the games that Microsoft wanted to publish after the film. Why would someone feel the desire to play in a world that had just ended tragically? To address this problem, the producers engaged the services of a team to create a distributed media experience (an alternate reality game) that brought the story alive in the world of players. The digital games did not happen, but the problem and attempt to remedy it highlights issues associated with expanding mono-medium stories.

The second type of timing therefore refers to projects that are **designed to be transmedia from the beginning: proactive transmedia**. It is here that a writer's creativity and understanding of transmedia is tested. Will all characters exist in all the media? What sort of characters and settings would suit both linear and interactive media? What story will be told or experienced in what media? In what order will they be released? How shall the release of each story in each media be paced? How will audiences be guided between media? What elements will be essential and what will be tertiary (if at all)? All of the questions and challenges a writer of a mono-medium story face, apply and are amplified in the transmedia context. Once again, a transmedia bible is also often created, to outline all of the elements to be told across media. This bible can be used as a development document (and it is therefore often changed), pitch document, and continuity document.

As you can imagine, a writer working in transmedia needs to have an intimate understanding of the media they're working in, and an understanding of how they will work together. In my experience, I've found the bare minimum for writers entering this area is an understanding of interactivity and thematics. Interactivity is important because transmedia writers working with any type of transmedia project need to understand how (among other things) to compel action in their audience, and how different points-of-entry affect plot. Thematics is important because a writer needs to understand how meaning can be communicated in many ways. They need to know how to communicate central messages beyond words, often with images, sound, framing, props and game mechanics. Almost a century ago, poet Guillaume Apollinaire gave a lecture, *L'Esprit Nouveau et les Poètes*, on what he described as the 'visible and unfolded book of the future'. He wrote that writers in the future will, 'like conductors of an orchestra of unbelievable scope,' have at 'their disposal the entire world, its noises and its appearances, the thought and language of man, song, dance, all the arts and all the artifices.' This is the future, and an unbelievable scope is here. It is time for the conductors to step forward with their batons.

## References

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