Report on NSCF-AHA Forum, 19 September, 2011

“Book to What Future? The Scholarly Monograph in the Digital Era”
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This one-day forum brought together leading academics, librarians, publishers and scholarly technologists to assess the value and viability of the scholarly monograph in our digital age. Conversations also ranged widely on the changing role of the constituencies that had a stake in the future of scholarly communication. These include: academic peers, libraries, university presses, administrators and funding bodies. Below is a summary of the key discussion points:

The future of the monograph: There was general consensus that the monograph continued to be the gold standard of academic merit in cases of tenure and promotion. However, the form it could take in the future was a topic of extended discussion. Suggestions ranged from composite print-and-multimedia publications to purely e-books. Analogue-generation scholars were urged to rethink the shift in technological interface from printed paper to smart phones and digital tablets and the impact this could have on the production of a 21st century monograph. The disconnect between disciplinary epistemologies and communication technologies was brought into sharp focus during these discussions. The market perspective from publishers and librarians provided a sobering check on the academic enthusiasm for the monograph especially in the Humanities. Scholars were alerted to a dramatic drop in sales of printed monograph in the last 20-30 years. The former librarian of ANU, Colin Steele, noted that ANU’s Book to Serial purchase ratio was 50:50 in 1980 and 18:82 in 2010. Librarians from UNSW, University of Sydney and CSIRO concurred with Steele’s view. The way forward was seen to be a ‘portfolio’ model of assessing publications with digital genres of scholarly communication complementing the traditional monograph and journal article. Prof Iain McCalman strongly appealed for trade books to be validated as academic publication. Scholarly monographs could not begin to match their circulation and impact, he said. Most agreed that monographs needed an e-version, especially given the audit environment in which
metrics play a big role. Thomson Reuters is about to trial a metric system for the e-monograph. There was also some discussion on the repertoire of digital literacies that ought to become part of research training. These include basic skills in text analysis, data mining, visualization, geospatial mapping and digital curation of art and material cultural objects.

Mutual Dependencies/Economies of Scale: Library and Publishing Infrastructure: The key agents of scholarly communication – librarians and publishers – were unanimous that they needed to work very closely in this digital era. E-scholarship was described as a relationship of mutual dependency between a library’s digital collections, specialized research repositories and publishing networks. Libraries were taking on a much larger role in critically mediating the needs of the University on the one hand, and the demands of the larger electronic world of scholarly publishing on the other. Their increasing importance in the stewardship of knowledge in our information age was beginning to be recognized across the world through massive infrastructural investment and innovation. The University of Michigan’s ambitious project to integrate within the library space several information, publishing and communication functions is one such example. Economies of scale were taken up as a serious topic of discussion. There was broad agreement in the library and publishing sectors that new consortium models needed to be explored in Australia, especially those that scaled up accessibility and circulation to global levels and at the same time cut acquisition costs. Dr Francis Pinter from Bloomsbury Academic presented one such model in which library budgets and acquisition lists could be pooled under a consortium umbrella. This consortium could periodically submit a commonly agreed set of titles to a network of publishing houses, which, in turn, could produce digital files of the required works that could be shared by libraries. She demonstrated that this would cut costs of individual acquisitions for libraries by almost 80% over a period of time.

The Changing Shape of Australian University Presses
There were illuminating presentations on First and Second generation university presses in the country. The former consists of the big four: MUP, UNSWP, UQP and UWAP. These are analogue era presses that have now expanded their publishing repertoire to meet the challenges of the digital world. They have increasingly adopted trade models to stay afloat and acknowledge that the proportion of scholarly to trade
publications has fallen dramatically over these years. The second generation are all E-presses. These include ANU, Sydney, Monash and Adelaide. They have begun filling the publishing vacuum left by the push to trade sales by the previous generation of U Presses. They are increasingly the first port of call for authors from their home universities and, as Prof James Fox from ANU demonstrated, they are highly effective in achieving levels of national and international circulation that are beyond the reach of conventional print presses. These E-Presses are open access and library based; they integrate a spectrum of scholarly research from across the campus including those that are published in serial form in niche areas; they incorporate editorial, design and indexing work; and at least for now are viable models for innovative and experimental scholarly communication.

Online Publishing and Digital Repositories
Presentations by academics and representatives from the publishing world exposed the participants to a range of online publication resources and digital repositories. These include the OAPEN (Open Access Publishing in European Networks), which is an initiative in Open Access publishing for humanities and social sciences monographs. It includes a consortium of 15 University-based academic publishers who aim to bring the successes of scientific Open Access publishing to the humanities and social sciences. Other networks include the US-based National Academies Press, the London-based Bloomsbury Academic, the Oxford University Press Online, OUP Online Resources Centre (to cater to new digital pedagogies) and Cambridge University Press Online. Participants were also encouraged to trawl through Gutenberg-e (Columbia UP) and the University of California E-Scholarship Program.

Accessibility, Copyright and Metrics
Discussion on these ranged from degrees of open access to their links to copyright and licensing frameworks. The Open was seen to have at least three gradations of meaning: 1. Direct Open Access, 2. Delayed Open Access and 3. Archives open to subscribers of digital repositories. This last is governed by an Open License regimen which offers shared rights. The first two are subject to various exception clauses in copyright laws. The presence of Prof Andrew Wells, Deputy CEO of ARC, at the meeting led to interesting discussion on the use of metrics and peer review in ERA 2012.
In sum, the key outcomes of the forum were:

- Recognition of the urgency to reconceptualise the shape and content of the monograph in ways suited to the digital world.
- An appeal to develop models of accreditation and performance measures that would value hybrid publication portfolios in tenure and promotion cases.
- An understanding of the role played by the para-academic sphere – i.e. library and publishing networks - to bridge the generation gap between print, analogue and digital scholarly worlds.
- Insights into mutual dependencies in the world of scholarly communication in the digital era.

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