capacity to speed up and fundamentally change the scholarly process, but such writing is generally regarded as extracurricular. One graduate student summed up the challenge best: "My drive to publish is about jobs, although ideally it would be about intellectual conversation. My drive to write is about scholarship."

My informal survey indicates that graduate students are frustrated, puzzled, and scared, but, overall, we remain ambitious and committed to success in the academy. We speak of our future in the profession (getting jobs, getting books published) in desperate, strategic, and careerist terms. But despite the crisis, the changes in the job market, and the development of electronic publishing, many of us maintain a commitment to the lost purpose of it all. I am inspired by my colleagues' devotion to the exchange of ideas and to the scholarly process in general, even if they (incongruously) feel such lofty goals are separate from what we must do to further our careers.

Note

1. On May 3, 2004, I sent an e-mail survey, entitled "Graduate Student Publishing Survey," to SCMSgrad-l and Screen-l, resulting in thirty-four responses. Several of those responses are cited verbatim in this article.

From the Crisis to the Commons

by Kathleen Fitzpatrick

I want to get the personal stuff out of the way as quickly as possible, and thus I begin with a bit of whining: last December, seventy-two hours after my tenure decision became final, I received a rejection from a press that had had my book manuscript under review for ten months. The note, as encouraging as rejections can be, emphasized that the fault, if fault there were, lay not with the manuscript but with the climate; the press had received two positive readers' reports, and the editor was enthusiastic about the project. The marketing people, however, had declared the book "a bad financial risk in the current economy."

I am writing in a dying field. Or so it seems given the way academic presses treat that field of late. What is interesting about this statement, though, is that my field is not hidebound or traditional. Nor, for that matter, is my field so ruthlessly cutting edge or so radically interdisciplinary that integrating it into current academic categories is difficult. My manuscript focuses on the relationship between contemporary literary fiction and television. More specifically, it focuses on recent novels that suggest that new media are driving literature out of the central cultural position it once inhabited.

In other words, I have written a book that argues that the book is not dying. If ever there were an argument that presses might have a vested interest in publishing,

it strikes me that this might be it. This is not to suggest that my work is so stellar that it is impossible to fathom its getting rejected, but one would think it would be in the best interest of academic presses to promote texts that argue for the continued relevance of print in the digital age. Nonetheless, there is a profound crisis in university press publishing largely revolving around the insupportable economics of the current publishing system. As Patrice Petro notes, in his May 2002 letter to the membership of the MLA, Stephen Greenblatt made many of these issues public, including that presses have radically cut back the number of books published in "certain fields." These fields are primarily in the humanities; numerous presses have ceased acquiring new manuscripts in literature altogether, and many others require hefty subventions from their authors. But the danger presented by this crisis is not simply that fewer books will be published; the crisis is rather, as Greenblatt goes on to suggest, one that directly threatens the futures of many potentially successful academics:

> Some junior faculty members who will be reviewed for tenure in this academic year are anxiously waiting to hear from various university presses. These faculty members find themselves in a maddening double bind. They face a challenge—under inflexible time constraints and with very high stakes—that many of them may be unable to meet successfully, no matter how strong or serious their scholarly achievement, because academic presses simply cannot afford to publish their books. The situation is difficult for those in English and even more difficult for those in foreign languages.
>
> We are concerned because people who have spent years of professional training—our students, our colleagues—are at risk. Their careers are in jeopardy, and higher education stands to lose, or at least severely to damage, a generation of young scholars.

Greenblatt's suggestions for ameliorating the situation focus on separating tenure decisions from the book standard, by diversifying the ways that scholars can demonstrate active, successful research agendas and by paying more careful attention to the quality of work (rather than relying on press readers to do so). This is an important topic of discussion, and one I am fortunate my department has paid close attention to.

I want to take a different turn, however, in considering possible solutions to the crisis in publishing. Suppose that instead of abandoning the monograph we make the monograph economically viable. Thus, here, I must reverse the argument of my manuscript: print publishing, at least of scholarly texts, may indeed be dying, crushed under the weight of its institutional production apparatus. The declining viability of print has been highlighted (though not caused) by the rise of various modes of electronic publishing. Journal publishing has already been through this crisis and has created some pioneering solutions, from which book publishing might learn.

Shorter texts (such as articles) lend themselves more easily to electronic delivery, because they are more likely to be read onscreen, but the parallel nature of the crises in publishing—declining library purchases coupled with rising production costs—suggests that there might be parallel solutions. The choice that we in the humanities are left with is to remain tethered to a dying system or to move

forward into a mode of publishing and distribution that will remain economically and intellectually supportable into the future.

The future mode of publishing must of necessity include some form of electronic distribution. But what form? Should academic presses move to a print-on-demand model? Or should they think more radically about an all-electronic delivery system, in which full-length texts are made available in portable formats, readable onscreen, and printable by the user? Or, most riskily perhaps, is there a way to escape the academic press model of publication entirely, moving to some new system of peer review and manuscript editing that sheds the troubled structures of press economics in favor of an open-source, communal mode of intellectual discovery?

If we actually attempted to follow through on this last option, how might we in the humanities set about creating such a system? The move toward online journal publication began in the sciences, where the publishing crisis first became evident; the move toward a new system of monograph publication must begin with those whose careers are most built around the monograph. Unfortunately, humanities scholars are (stereotypically, at least) also the most likely to work within the old system rather than imagining—let alone creating—something technologically and structurally new.

However, creating something new also creates a series of dangers: those pioneers who first make the leap to a new system of open-source electronic publishing risk having traditionalists distrust their vitae. It is perhaps no accident that the first experiments in online journal publication in the humanities were by and large conducted by those whose research took as its object new media and contemporary technologies: scholars who could convincingly argue to promotion committees that the new form of publication itself was part of the research. Moreover, scholars doing research into these fields were more likely to read seriously (and, perhaps most important, to cite) work published online. With the success of journals such as *Postmodern Culture* and *electronic book review*, other fields have gradually been emboldened to follow.

There are instructive details in this narrative: scholars in noncontemporary, nonmedia-related fields will not accept electronically delivered monographs until the mode of delivery has first been proven viable, or, more to the point, until other scholars take material published in such a mode seriously. If there is to be a revolution in monograph publishing, then, it must begin with those working in new media, electronic textuality, the history of technology, and so forth. Only scholars in these fields can reasonably argue that their form must follow their content; only these scholars can reasonably expect that their colleagues will find, read, and take seriously texts published electronically. Only then, when the new form has been demonstrated to be viable, will scholars in other fields make the same leap. And only then, when scholars have begun to make that leap, will the academic publishing crisis truly be averted.

To that end, I am here announcing the founding of ElectraPress, a new electronic imprint that will focus on publishing book-length manuscripts in the area of new media studies. Manuscripts will be peer reviewed, vetted by an editorial board, and carefully edited, ensuring the publications are of high quality and significance.

We hope, moreover, that in the short run we will give aid to the community of scholars caught in the publishing crisis, by developing working relationships between ElectraPress and the humanities/new media editors at the presses we admire. We hope these editors will refer projects to us that they feel ought to be published but that their presses have turned down on financial grounds.

One key difference between Electra and traditional academic publishing will be that all work will be produced on an open-source, Creative Commons model; this system will rely on the volunteer labor of editors, peer reviewers, board members, designers, programmers, and, of course, authors. Authors who publish with Electra will be asked to give back to the community by reviewing and editing manuscripts of other scholars. Most important, the results of this labor will be made freely available to the scholarly community and to other interested readers. What we hope to accomplish is a true return of intellectual labor to an economy of the gift, in which the work is done to *contribute* to the growing body of knowledge rather than, even if illusorily, to *profit* therefrom.

Because of the volunteer nature of the project, at least at first, few manuscripts will be taken on. As the volunteer base grows, and more scholars accept Electra's publication model, progress will no doubt accelerate. I urge anyone concerned about the publishing crisis to participate in this project. Insofar as true solutions to the publishing crisis may be found, they can only arise from within the academic community itself.

How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Crisis in Publishing

by Eric Smoodin

I approach the issue of the crisis in publishing from what I hope is an interesting and unique position. I began teaching full-time at a university in 1985. Since then, I have produced books and other forms of scholarship. For three years, though, from 1998 to 2001, I worked as the film, media, and philosophy acquisitions editor at the University of California Press. So, for that period, I was responsible for finding the books that the press would eventually publish in those fields.

From this experience, I believe that, in a certain sense, there really isn't a crisis in publishing. The very word *crisis* implies that there have been decades of publishing paradise for academics, followed by a recent catastrophic shift. Publishing has never gone smoothly; there are always problems in the industry and problems that affect fields (film was not always the relatively desirable field it is today). However, over the last five or ten years, the publishing industry has undergone some significant structural and economic changes that have placed some serious burdens on authors