COPYRIGHT AGENCY PUBLISHER FELLOWSHIP ACQUITTAL
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Itinerary
4 July – 8 July: London
9 July – 15 July: Bath

Introduction
I approached my Copyright Agency Cultural Fund Publisher Fellowship with two main questions: how do trade publishers innovate in a time of digital evolution, and what form will that innovation take?

As a reader, I've been fascinated by all things transmedia for some time. But as a publisher, I have struggled to imagine how hybrid print/digital storytelling in its many forms will enter commercial publishing. So further to the above two questions, I wanted to investigate: How will these transmedia 'products' be available to the market? How will they be written and what will the production process entail? What will the supply chain and profit margin look like? Who will actually publish them?

The fellowship took me to the UK – London and Bath – to interview publishers and attend two fascinating conferences: the 15th International Conference on Books, Publishing and Libraries; and the 2017 Mix Digital Conference.

In this report I recount select sessions from the two conferences I attended – that is, the sessions that were the most interesting – and then conclude with my findings.

London
During a hot summer week in London I met with publishers, explored bookshops including the impressive flagship Foyles store on Charing Cross Road with its successful events-driven focus, and attended the International Conference on Books, Publishing and Libraries. With the subtitle 'The Publisher Is Dead; Long Live the Publisher!', the conference explored the following scope:

> To publish is a social and public act. This act is a negotation between an author, a 'publisher', and an audience. The digital age is said to change the terms of this negotiation. As platforms of production and distribution become more widely accessible, the traditional notion of the 'publisher' has in some senses become redundant. In some interpretations 'the publisher' is seen as the old guard of an outmoded knowledge system, an unnecessary blockage between the author and his or her audience. In place of the 'the publisher' we have new digital platforms and information systems available to provide unmediated reach to audiences. In this process, what aspects of the role of the publisher are being offloaded onto the author? What do these changes tell us about the future of publishing and about those who can become 'visible' in the new economy?

Despite being somewhat amused by the constant use of quotation marks around the word publisher, I found the scope topical and of interest. The conference's specific areas of concern were access, diversity and democracy, and three themes formed the heart of the conference.

Theme 1 was 'Publishing practices – past, present and future' and explored the 'changing processes of textual production and distribution from past to present, and the impacts of digitization, the internet, and e-book readers on the future of publishing'. The papers under this theme focused on:

- considering the changing roles of publishers, editors, and designers, as well as changes in the workflow from author to reader
- examining issues and concerns of specialty publishing (trades; scientific, technical, medical; university presses)
- typography and typesetting: past, present, and future
- the printed book: from letterpress to print-on-demand
- roles of authors, editors, publishers, designers
- bookstores: past, present, and future
- e-book readers and mobile devices
- computer-mediated writing processes
- open source, open access, self-publishing, and 'specialized' forms of publishing
- multilingual publishing: unicode, machine translation, and other tools of the global publishing trade
- multimodal texts: books with animation, video, audio, or dataset
- marketing and distribution of books, e-books, journals, textbooks.

The second theme, 'Reading, writing, literacy and learning' looked at how these processes have changed over time, and covered:

- redefining literacy and exploring new strategies for literacy education
- from reader to 'user': interactivity and navigation in books
- creative writing: so what's creativity, and how is it taught?
- writing for children in an era of competing pleasures
- learning to read and write
- distance learning: old challenges and new opportunities
- the textbook as a medium of instruction: past, present, and future
- multiliteracies: multimedia and multimodal texts in learning environments
- literary critiques and analyses.

The third theme, 'Books and libraries' explored the changing form of the book as an object and how it is retained:

- consideration of the form, structure, and processes of libraries, archives, multi-media resources
- the changing role of the library
- librarians' work today
- e-books in libraries
- metadata and resource discovery
- indexing and cataloguing in the electronic age
- manuscripts, rare books, and archival practices.

It was more of an academic conference than I expected. This was interesting in itself, to see what elements of the book trade were being examined at a scholarly level and why.

The keynote speaker was Angus Phillips, director of the Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies, who in my view was aiming to provide a trade context for the academics attending. He discussed the culture of bestsellers and the lack of diversity in books – that is, increasing choice but decreasing diversity – and spoke more philosophically about the essence of a book.

The stand-out session for me was Unbinding the Book, a talk about a collaboration between publisher and academic Anna Kiernan and artist/art director Ben James from Jotta Studio, which explored the potential of technologies such as virtual reality to create narrative-led environments. Inspired by Max Porter's brilliant book, *Grief Is a Thing with Feathers*, Kiernan and James created a virtual reality storytelling project entitled *And the memory fills all space* about how we feel, understand and communicate the universal experience of grief. For Kiernan and James, they see the immersive aspect of VR as a way a 'book concept can engage different audiences', with VR potentially appealing to 'hard-to-reach readers' and offering 'a gateway for engaging with literary texts via a non-literary context'. Accessibility is just one of the benefits of VR. I found the idea of adapting a book into a VR experience fascinating, especially a creative non-fiction work such as Porter's. The process for this project turned a linear text into an immersive environment, pushing the boundaries of traditional storytelling. This, as Kiernan explained, is not just to transform the story but to bring the book to life in a medium-specific way. In adapting a book to a VR experience, publishers can challenge the longstanding fidelity to form – we don't have to be faithful to print.

This session – one of the few that I saw at this conference that included someone with trade publishing experience – was the first time I really noted the criticality of collaboration. Innovative projects that cross the print-digital boundary evolve from collaboration with those outside of the publishing sphere. It also led me to ask, if print is collaborative, what changes when the reading experience (through digital media) becomes collaborative rather than solitary?

There were a number of sessions on feminist publishing, one of which asked 'do publishers matter and why do they matter?' American academic Julie Ensler spoke about the importance of context over content, saying that 'content and context are necessary for bibliodiversity'. Using feminist press Out and Out Books as a case study, she showed that context was provided by the press being community oriented, having multiple voices and identifying audiences. This session led me to ask what it means for trade publishers to provide the context to the content they publish and how that might happen.

In another feminist session, academic Cecilia Farr spoke on the importance of feminist print culture and how the women's movement was catalysed in print, affirming my idealistic belief that books can change the world.

Overall it was an interesting conference but it reinforced for me the need for a bridging between academic publishing studies and the realities of the publishing trade.

Bath

The 2017 Mix Digital conference considers itself at 'the forefront of both research into and teaching of creative practice across many forms' and 'an innovative forum for the discussion and exploration of writing and technology'. For the 2017 conference, the brief was:

> After more than two decades of innovation and experimentation, the relationship between reading, writing, form, content and delivery platform remains in flux. The ebook has taken its place alongside the print book and the multimedia story app and/or website have become familiar modes for reading and viewing. Developers are creating dramatic story and character-led narratives via independent games while interactive and immersive theatre-makers are finding new ways to engage audiences well beyond traditional theatre spaces. Television storytelling conventions continue to evolve in line with the dominance of streaming services; new reading habits and engagement strategies now surround the form of digital comics. Music exhibitors are forging increased participatory opportunities via developments in live-touring; spoken word continues to thrive at the same time as poetry film is gaining wider recognition; virtual reality and augmented reality are both making in-roads into documentary and fiction; literary forms are morphing and changing in response to the affordances of the smartphone and tablet; pervasive and locative media are shaping how literature is understood and read. Digital media technologies foster creative ways of telling stories across multiple platforms. New media hasn't been 'new' for quite some time and the word 'digital' is rapidly becoming redundant as technology becomes more deeply enmeshed within our cities, our homes, our lives. In this context, a conference that looks at where creative writing, storytelling and media creation intersects with and/or is dependent upon technology should be as interdisciplinary as possible, and that's what we are aiming for with MIX 2017.

Attending the Mix Digital conference at Bath Spa University were creators, researchers, academics, artists, coders and more, all interested in exploring the intersections of story, technology, writing and creative practice – essentially transmedia narrative. A sprawling term, 'transmedia narrative' is not easy to define as one thing, but consider it storytelling that moves beyond printed text alone, across and inclusive of multiple platforms.

The conference opened with a fascinating keynote by Canadian Caitlin Fisher, director of the Augmented Reality Labe at York University. Fisher's research looks at the future of narrative through interactive storytelling in augmented reality environments – environments that combine print and digital technologies. She spoke about her work with Future Stories (http://futurestories.ca/) and recounted her personal experiences and challenges with developing story in emerging technologies. Fascinating were her points about creativity and storytelling outpacing technology – I liked the idea that the creative urge to tell stories will also lead the tech (whether or not that might in fact be the case) – and her opinion that audiences have a fear of doing things correctly when it comes to new tech. She noted the challenge of how to get readers to explore in environments of mixed technology and suggested it was important (and no doubt good for business) to meet the audience where they are. It reminded me that the technology

of the book is simple and straightforward, a perfect blend of form and function that readers know how to use.

One of the first sessions post the keynote was transmedia theory and practice with Australian academics Donna Hancox and Dan Lynch. Hancox made the point that transmedia presents us with 'an ecology of forms', so creative writing 'encompasses practices that are not just text based' (drawn from scholar Henry Jenkins). In a discussion about storyworlds, she explained that transmedia offers the chance to create authentic storyworlds, which are as much about aesthetic as narrative, and provides the opportunity to use multiple forms to lift the story. The idea of storyworlds allows writers to present narratives in new ways, exploring the potential of transmedia.

One example of transmedia narrative is the genre of ambient literature, and there were a number of sessions focused on this. In ambient literature, the boundaries and features of your physical location become part of the story. Ambient literature, said academic Amy Spencer in her session, 'connects internal and external worlds as a reader navigates both physical and imaginative spaces'. This is most often achieved by using location apps (such as Google Maps) and a soundtrack on your phone while also reading a print book. Sometimes websites are also used. Spencer described ambient lit as a creative experience where 'spatial boundaries and borders become narrative forms' and the boundaries between reader and work become more porous. She reminded us that art is part of the real world and spoke about connecting the interiority of the experience of reading a book and the external experiences of the real world, saying that ambient lit is about 'using the phone to make the world more interesting than the phone'.

During one afternoon at the conference, I skipped the session I had planned to see to have an 'ambient literature' experience myself. I've experienced various forms of digital storytelling and often found that the story was secondary to the actual technology – the narrative existed as the vehicle to explore and play with the tech. At this conference, however, I experienced ambient lit done particularly well. When I read and listened to Duncan Speakman's *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, I was astounded.

According to the blurb, *It Must Have Been Dark by Then* uses 'a mixture of evocative music, narration and field recording to bring you stories of changing environments, from the swamplands of Louisiana, to empty Latvian villages and the edge of the Tunisian Sahara. Unlike many audio guides, there is no preset route—the software builds a unique map for each person's experience. It is up to you to choose your own path'.

Before I began, I had to download the app to my phone, put on a pair of headphones, pick up the physical book and head outside where there was space to walk a good distance (the experience usually lasts one or two hours). Walking in the Bath woodlands on a grey, rainy afternoon, I'd listen to the narrator, read a chapter of the book when directed to and walk to different locations (for example, as characters are dealing with floods, I was directed to 'find a place where water runs'). My path was marked on a stripped-back Google Maps, showing only my location as a blue dot, along with an occasional second dot I had to walk towards.

The story itself was about belonging, displacement and global warming, and would have worked perfectly well in the single form of a print book. But the content was powerfully magnified by the ambience: the soundtrack, my location and my physical movement. It felt less like a book and more like a movie, in that a movie (when viewed in a cinema) is an immersive experience; you don't put it down and come back to it a day later in the way you might with a book. I couldn't imagine interrupting it and returning to it later. Everything about the experience was connected to that moment – what I could see, the elements around me, the wind on my face. I was both present in a physical place and immersed in an inner reading experience.

As a reader, I loved it. As a publisher, my questions were many, spanning the design choices in the book and the potential RRP to the evolution of the collaboration and how the text was created – was it written like a manuscript or developed in a collaborative process? And, what does the publishing world do with these hybrid print/digital books? How do you publish transmedia literature? From what I could see, it feels like these kind of works are more *produced* than published, and that was a conclusion I took away from the entire Mix Digital conference.

At the end of *It Must Have Been Dark by Then*, the map marking your path is deleted from your phone. I wanted to keep it, something tangible from a fascinating story-journey that encompassed both the inner life of reading a book and a physically immersive reading of place and context.

After I'd finished and returned the headphones and the book, I spoke with one of the producers of the work, Tom Abba. He gave me his business card. On the back it read: 'fuck eBooks, reimagine reading'. For me this seemed to sum up many of the practitioners I met – they wanted to push the boundaries of what a 'book' is and how storytelling can be experienced.

Tom Abba presented his own session on ambient lit at the conference. For him, this genre asks us to reconsider the way we engage with literature, to think about space, the things we walk past, the architecture of our lives. As an associate professor at University of West England, a resident at the Pervasive Media Studio, director of Circumstance, and a writer and designer, Abba brought an interesting combination of experience to the table. This mixed background was representative of many of the attendees and made this a fascinating and useful conference. Abba, along with a couple of the other presenters, is a member of Ambient Literature, a two-year collaboration between UWE, Bath Spa University, the University of Birmingham and development partner Calvium. Read more here: https://ambientlit.com/. To see this kind of transdisciplinary–business partnership, 'established to investigate the locational and technological future of the book', was inspiring and I wanted more of this kind of collaboration in Australia (Editions at Play, Google's collaboration with Visual Editions is one example of a UK/Australia partnership).

In a philosophical session, academic and another member of Ambient Literature, Matt Hayler described how fictional ambience reveals the real ambience of the world around us; it is, he said, 'a lie told perfectly to reflect a truth'.

Liz Evans presented a session on transmedia engagement, and elements of her talk struck me as relevant to book publishing. In her opinion, transmedia provides engaging experiences and it's this engagement that is of value to industry. Engaged users are evangelists for the creative work, whether it be a book, a TV show or a form of transmedia storytelling. Engagement can cover participation, love and devotion (fandom), talking about it, choice and attention. And while transmedia practitioners might see engagement as media specific, audiences see engagement as universal, not tied to one medium. We see engagement in book publishing as a key factor in a book achieving strong sales success – readers feeling connected, loving the book, building communities around characters and story. This engagement is not quantitative but qualitative. Metrics don't catch this kind of engagement.

I came away from the ambient literature sessions (and my own experience of it) asking, is there a publisher role in ambient lit? My sense is possibly no – it feels like the elements of what a publisher does would be done by a producer. Are publishers bound to the book? It definitely made me question the future role of a publisher.

Other interesting sessions included Hannah Wood talking about playable narratives, stories that can be played and that are developed through playing. I liked her idea that playable narratives are about the 'reader' discovering a story rather than being *told* a story. Dylan Spicer examined the impact of transmedia on writing practice, suggesting that transmedia allows for separate elements of work to connect into a larger narrative and is also an opportunity for writers to use 'the detritus of your creative library'. In his own practice, he has brought scraps of old projects together and created new ideas out of old, forgotten ones. He has written in (or possibly created) the genre of Excel spreadsheet fiction because, why not? Jordan Glendinning, in his session on digital tapestries, asked how does writing a multi-threaded narrative in digital fiction affect the creative process? In discussions around digital disruption, I think consideration of what the impact will be on authors (other than the practical aspects of royalties and sales etc) is actually forgotten. How will these new forms of storytelling be experienced by the writers creating them?

A second keynote later in the conference was entitled Seven Types of Ambiguity by Professor Jonathon Dovey. For Dovey, ambient literature is a deliberate strategy of ambiguity, and, for readers/users, allowing for ambiguous experience can be good design. Creators working in transmedia are not just writing literary texts, they are producing literary experiences. Dovey also noted that the future is *mixed reality* works rather than virtual reality works.

Other sessions included a poet and academic, Richard Carter, using drone photography and algorithms to create poetry; a session on Paper Nations, a creative writing lab for young people, which encouraged writing in schools; Kate Haines on mutable media and the relationships between print, knowledge production, digital and literature, medium and audience, aesthetics and value; and Joe Reddington's exploration of the story's story, a computer-led design for a novel. I came away from many of these sessions intrigued by whether ideas and stories are driven by the technology or vice versa, and also sometimes asking 'why?' For some of the new forms

of storytelling and new products being discussed here, there may never be a market, an audience. But perhaps these are still key parts of the success/failure/success nature of the evolution of innovation.

One of the final sessions was from Anna Gerber and Britt Iverson of London-based publisher Visual Editions, which has collaborated with Google Creative Labs in Sydney to create Editions at Play, a space for books 'powered by the magic of the internet'. This was a fascinating session about a collaboration that is truly pushing the boundaries of print and digital. They talked about books that 'cannot be printed', making books as digital artefacts, and making books that integrate storytelling experiences. It was an inspiring discussion about what future 'books' may look like, but what struck me was the honest discussion about the financials. They now give away their products for free via Google Play; this may change in the future but at this stage, it's about seeding the market because (in my understanding), there was no way they could ask consumers to pay the true price of development and they certainly don't have economies of scale at this stage. (What do economies of scale look like in a digital world?) See more about their work at https://editionsatplay.withgoogle.com/#/ and http://visual-editions.com/.

On the last day of the conference, a book of the conference proceedings was presented to all attending by the Book Kernel team (http://bookkernel.com/). Book Kernel makes books of events and presents it before the event has finished. For Book Kernel's Ben Gwalchmai, Book Kernel books represent 'the intersection of the physical and digital ... between traditional publishing and contemporary social-media practice', with descriptions of conference sessions, tweets and texts, comments from participants, and papers from presenters. Compared with a standard book production schedule, it was pretty impressive to have a book before the end of the conference, and it represented what books can do – give the reader something tangible to return to.

Conclusion
The role of publisher is the key starting point for the publishing cycle, and we need more discussions on how that that role and its practice will change as publishing evolves. As John Thompson states in *Merchants of Culture*, publishers 'know how to play the game ... but they may not be able to formulate these rules in an explicit fashion' (2012, 12). Likewise, publishing theorist Michael Bhaskar says that commissioning is 'in fact deeply troubled, and the whole gamut of editorial or creative input on the publishing side can tell us no more than that publishing involves content' (2012, 25).

From a professional point of view, the fellowship allowed me to dig deeper into what a publisher does, to shine a light on these unarticulated practices of publishing. It offered an opportunity to speak with innovative publishers in another country, facing both similar and different issues to our industry, and a chance to build upon my knowledge and bring that knowledge into my own commissioning practice. I saw examples of nascent digital/transmedia publishing emerging from creative research labs (and heard the fascinating stories of their development) and started to truly question what – if anything – a publisher may add in these situations. Finally, the fellowship provided a valuable chance to engage in broad-ranging and synergistic discussions on publisher

practice, the future of publishing and cutting-edge publishing research with creators, researchers and more.

On an informal level, my takeaway was that publishers and other publishing staff are simply too busy to attend these kinds of conferences, to do this kind of research, to have these conversations. In a time of tightening budgets and reduced resources, I'm not sure how that will, or can, change. It seems that much of the fun, creative innovation will continue to occur outside of, or on the outskirts of, the publishing industry and only enter the mainstream once the risk-taking innovation has been done.

Because we have seen trade publishers struggle to innovate and take risks while continuing business as usual, with new ventures and left-of-centre initiatives often closing after a relatively short period of time. From this fellowship it became clear to me that it is in spaces *outside* of traditional publishing that we see emerging and diverse innovation. Development, experimentation and risk-taking are happening in university-funded creative labs and in the studios of individual artists and practitioners. A critical component of this is collaboration. As much as I can sense my impatience of 'when are we going to see transmedia works enter the marketplace in a significant way', I believe we are five to ten years away before these works are everyday occurrences in the mass market. The opportunity to push the boundaries of print and digital, to create something original and find new ways to market will eventually, I hope, find paths into trade publishing. Until then, the more we can learn, experience and collaborate, the smoother the journey will be.