

MONO

THE MONOGRAPH –
An old-fashioned publication
forum or an ultimate scholarly
achievement?

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MONOGRAPH

Introduction

Writing and publishing are, arguably, the most important things academics do – for the obvious reason that the results of science and scholarship must be made public in order for them to be subordinated to critical discussion. It is only through such discussion that any results of research can claim the status of academic knowledge. Furthermore, it is generally agreed that university teaching ought to be based on original research. Publishing thus lies at the center of all academic activities – research, education, and societal interaction. Without reliable practices of academic publishing, the entire system of science and scholarship, as we know it, would collapse.

This exhibition of academic monographs published by current and former fellows of the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, a strongly international and interdisciplinary research institute within the University of Helsinki, focusing on the humanities and social sciences (broadly conceived), manifests monograph publication in its academic richness, often in an interdisciplinary fashion.

For the research profile and other publications of HCAS fellows, see www.helsinki.fi/collegium, as well as our TUHAT profile.

Defining the monograph

The monograph – the focus of this exhibition – is of course only one form of scientific, academic, and/or scholarly communication among many. It must be distinguished from the journal article, the book chapter, the textbook, and the general non-fiction book, among others. For the purposes of this exhibition, we may characterize the monograph as *an original book-length scholarly study of a focused and unified theme, topic, or issue, with a (broadly) narrative chapter structure, authored by one or several scholars, who may have distinctive special roles within the publication while sharing a joint authorship*. All monographs are books (printed either traditionally on paper or made available electronically), but, clearly, not all books are monographs. No article is a monograph, and no monograph is a (mere) article, though one can write a monograph by first writing articles and then revising them into a unified whole, or by expanding an article into book length.

The monograph differs from *journal articles and chapters in collected volumes* in its scope and length. Typically, monographs are at least 100 pages long, and in most cases longer – in some cases significantly longer. The monograph allows the scholar to develop an idea or an argument in considerable length and detail. In contemporary academic publishing,

MONOGRAPH

journal articles and book chapters are typically around 20 pages long; hence, the scholarly work that needs to be done for a monograph is much more substantial. One might say that while a 20-page article, or book chapter, enables a scholar to make one novel key point about a scholarly problem, a monograph enables her/him to make several related points about a unified subject matter, and to develop her/his reasoning by means of a systematically unfolding narrative and argument. As a result, the entire argumentative and narrative approach of a monograph is crucially different from that of a journal article. The monograph is not just a large-scale article; it is a different way of approaching a scholarly issue.

Moreover, the monograph differs from the *collection of articles* – even from a collection of articles authored by one and the same person. A collection of articles could also address a more or less focused and unified theme, and obviously the boundary between a monograph and a collection may be fuzzy to some extent. But the basic difference is that articles, even when collected into a single volume authored by the same scholar, are self-contained in a sense in which monograph chapters are not. The fundamental unit of expression is, therefore, *either* the article *or* the monograph. Articles – often originally separately published articles – can be, and often are, used as background material for a monograph. In many cases, the author of a monograph needs to obtain the permissions to use her/his earlier articles from their original publishers (e.g., journals). Even then, those articles – when turned into monograph chapters – need to be considerably revised in order to make them genuine functional parts of a monograph, instead of self-contained publications that could simply be bound together and put between the covers.

Clearly, the monograph must be distinguished from the *textbook*. The latter is written primarily for students and is intended to be used in the classroom. The former is written primarily for a community of other scholars, that is, to the author's academic peers, and though it may also be used as required or supplementary reading in teaching, its use as such educational material is not integral to its nature as an academic contribution, viz., to its being the kind of academic product that it is. Admittedly, however, the distinction between textbooks and original research is very much sharper in the natural sciences than it is in the humanities and social sciences (where, obviously, monographs are typical). In the latter fields, there are books, including some famous books by leading authors, that may function, or may be partially read as, both monographs and textbooks. We might say, perhaps, that a book that can be primarily characterized as a monograph can also be read as a textbook. Obviously, one and the same publication can be used for a variety of different purposes. This is hardly any more mysterious than it is to say that piles of monographs might be employed as self-made stairs needed to climb a few steps to reach

GRAPH

something one needs from a cupboard located up on the wall, or that a thick monograph could be used to break a window one needs to break.

Finally, the monograph differs from the *general non-fiction book*, even though monographs and non-fiction books can address similar topics and even use relatively similar narrative techniques. Again, the boundary may be unclear in some cases, especially in academic fields that are also of interest to wider audiences (such as history, cultural studies, or religious studies). Generally, monographs are academic publications, primarily written for an audience of recognized experts in the field. While the recognized expert may also read a general non-fiction book with great interest, and such books may contain (relatively) new academic knowledge about their subject matter, the primary purpose of a monograph is to formulate a genuinely novel idea, thought, or argument to an academic community whose key goal is the systematic and critical search for new knowledge – that is, to an audience or community that can be expected to play a crucial role in the critical evaluation and testing of that new idea, thought, or argument. In contrast, the non-fiction book is written with a significantly broader educated audience in mind. It communicates already existing knowledge, rather than producing or critically testing new knowledge claims (though, admittedly, this boundary, again, inevitably remains somewhat fuzzy).

The significance of the monograph in different disciplines: usefulness and creativity

Today, academics – young academics in particular – are increasingly encouraged to publish the results of their research in high-impact journals. Journal rankings have been produced, both at the European level and nationally in various countries, including Finland. The funding of universities may partly depend on the ranking status of the publication forums in which professors, other academics, and doctoral students publish their work.

These developments are in many ways positive, and there can be no denying of the importance of journal articles for the dissemination of new scientific and academic knowledge. Leading journals in all academic fields undeniably publish first-rate work that significantly advances human learning and understanding. However, the leading journals may also be, and in many cases are, mainstream journals. It may be difficult to really present essentially novel scientific or scholarly ideas in such publishing forums. In some cases, the monograph form is truly needed to present genuinely original and creative research ideas. This may be because the creativity and originality of such ideas may only be intelligible with reference to both the past (i.e., originality in relation to what has been

MONO

done earlier in the scholarly community) and the future (i.e., significance to what may be done later). Arguably, a temporal context that a narrative structure can make explicit is needed to adequately indicate these characteristics of research.

The long perspective of the monograph ought to be taken very seriously. The basic mission of universities, and scholarship generally (with a perspective of several centuries) should not be buried under the more and more widespread business-like demands of immediate “impact” and relevance in the contemporary academia. This is one reason why scholars, especially in the humanities and social sciences, still ought to be encouraged to publish monographs in addition to (not instead of) journal articles. The special and irreducible value of the monograph in comparison to all other forms of producing academic knowledge ought to be recognized by the academic community, as well as those who provide its funding. We should definitely not give up monographs, nor should we too dramatically redefine their tasks in the contemporary academic world (e.g., by reducing them to mere textbooks or popular books); on the contrary, we should appreciate the *irreducible plurality of academic publishing*, realizing that merely producing immense numbers of journal articles will *not* compensate for the lack of publishing deeply reflective, narratively argumentative, unified yet comprehensive studies on issues that are too substantial to be adequately dealt with in a single article, however intelligent and impact-producing.

The notion of *impact* – inevitably invoked in journal rankings – is itself problematic.¹ A book that gets only limited attention during its author’s lifetime, is buried in the library for a couple of centuries, and only then gets read by someone *might* turn out to have more impact in the long run than a fashionable book or article with thousands (or millions) of readers that will be forgotten after the fashion has changed. (Not to speak of the hype “branding” of the university and its various spin-offs.) Moreover, measuring impact is notoriously difficult, if not impossible – especially in the humanities. It is difficult to underevaluate the “impact” of Plato’s, Aristotle’s, Descartes’s, Kant’s, Peirce’s, or Wittgenstein’s ideas, although some of them may not immediately have received much attention (or the right kind of attention). This doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t publish in high-impact journals or aim at social relevance. What it means is that we shouldn’t overhastily give up traditional forms of publishing, such as the monograph.

It might still be asked what the *use* of publishing monographs is. How are they useful, if they are? The impact of journal articles may be much greater, and monographs are typically rather slow to get written and thus also slow to reach their intended academic audience. Given the increasing expectations of efficacy, usefulness, and relevance, the

¹ On impact factors and on the evaluation of the quality of research output, see, for example, the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (2013), <http://am.ascb.org/dora>.

MONOGRAPH

humanities and the social sciences – perhaps more than the more obviously instrumentally valuable and socially relevant natural and medical sciences – constantly need to consider the “value” or “benefit” they are able to produce for the enviroing society. While this concern has always been relevant to scholars writing monographs, this form of academic publishing can be said to primarily advance basic research that is not necessarily expected to directly benefit society but is motivated out of purely academic interests. The scholar who is writing a monograph should primarily seek the truth – pursuing critical discussion and reflection – instead of practical utility, even though her/his research results may turn out to be strongly relevant to society. Research in the humanities, in particular, is a value in itself, and it may be “useful” or “beneficial” in highly unexpected ways. Indeed, best research in these fields can demonstrate that the dichotomy between “intrinsic value” and “instrumental value” is often extremely misleading.

At the same time, it is important to continue critical discussion of what can be meant by “usefulness” in this context. This issue has been on the agenda of not only the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies but of all institutes for advanced study since the beginning: when the internationally leading institute of this kind, the Institute for Advanced Study (IAS) in Princeton, New Jersey, was established in 1930, its founders argued that basic research pursued not out of any immediate concerns for usefulness but out of pure intellectual curiosity turns out to be the most “useful” in the long run. We may refer back to the words of the first director of the Princeton IAS, Abraham Flexner, who urged the then newly founded institution to be “a free society of scholars – free, because mature persons, animated by intellectual purposes, must be left to pursue their own interests in their own ways”. In his 1939 essay, “The Usefulness of Useless Knowledge”, Flexner further argued that institutions of higher learning are the more likely to contribute to human welfare the less they are “deflected by considerations of immediacy of application”. This spirit still animates not only the IAS but the practice of writing, publishing, and reading monographs in the scholarly communities that exist today.²

The monograph and the Finnish Publication Forum rankings

Over the past years, increasing attention has been paid to evaluating the channels through which we academics publish our research. For an individual scholar, the most important

² For discussions of the usefulness of useless knowledge in Flexner’s spirit, see Wittrock (2002) and Pihlström (2011b).

MONNO

criterion in choosing a potential publication channel – for example, a journal, a book series or a publishing house – is presumably the hope to reach the relevant audience. However, other criteria are also recognized when publication channels are compared and ranked, as in the on-going national Publication Forum project organized by the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies (for details, also in English, see www.tsv.fi/julkaisufoorumi). Analogous national projects had previously been completed at least in Australia, Denmark, and Norway, and their results were utilized in the Finnish ranking. The European Reference Index for the Humanities (ERIH) prepared by the European Science Foundation was also part of the background information of the project.³

Largely in order to enable the Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture to allocate public funding – tax payers’ money – to Finnish universities not only on the basis of the results of education (such as the numbers of doctoral and master’s degrees produced annually) but also on the basis of the quality of research, publication channels used in different academic fields were ranked into three categories. Accordingly, the primary motivation for the entire project came from the need to emphasize the quality of research more than previously. A “quality factor” had to be built into the funding allocation model used by the Ministry of Education and Culture.

The result is a three-category ranking. The basic level 1, according to the instructions of the project, “comprises the most important domestic and foreign publication channels in the various disciplines” meeting fundamental quality control criteria such as peer review. The more demanding level 2 “covers the leading scientific publication channels [...] with the researchers from various countries publishing their best research outcomes”. Finally, the highest level 3 is intended for publication channels that comprehensively cover a certain discipline or area and are most highly regarded by the relevant international research communities. Approximately 10% of journals and publication series have reached level 2, while only 3% have reached level 3. In addition to journals, book publishers were also included in the ranking; however, for publishers there were initially just two levels instead of three. In the update ranking in 2014, the third (highest) level was introduced for publishers, too. Only 7% of all ranked publishers are on level 2, and only 1% on level 3. (See http://www.tsv.fi/julkaisufoorumi/materiaalit/jufo_kayttoohje_2015.pdf.)

For the 23 disciplinary panels with expert members representing different Finnish universities, at least in principle covering all academic fields, it was – and still is – a highly demanding task to classify the thousands of journals included in the initial lists prepared by the secretariat of the project, based on the previous rankings in different countries, as

³ The website of the project, www.tsv.fi/julkaisufoorumi/english.html, contains a number of relevant links to these previous rankings, as well as comprehensive background information and other documents.

GRAPH

well as Scopus and Web of Science classifications. The total number of 19,481 journals or series and 1,210 academic publishers were included in the first official Publication Forum classification, completed in fall 2011. The rankings were made public at the website of the project (see above), and starting in 2015, the Ministry of Education and Culture will use this information as a factor in its funding allocation model. In between, an update was provided in 2014, with as many as 23,712 journals or series and 2,184 academic publishers included in the revised rankings. Hence, the results of the classification – the hard work done by the panel members representing the Finnish academic community – will have a genuine effect on how Finnish universities in the future receive public funding.

Already the first round rankings in 2011 were a matter of several compromises, some of which were easy, some more difficult to make. The lines distinguishing the levels were inevitably somewhat arbitrary. Even more severe forms of arbitrariness have been feared, however. According to the “user instructions” of the Publication Forum (see again www.tsv.fi), the classification is “suited for” evaluating “large publication quantities, such as the entire production of universities or research institutes”, rather than individual researchers, and for “comparisons between publications in the same discipline”, instead of interdisciplinary comparisons. The classification is a *discipline-dependent quality indicator* only predicting “the average quality and impact of large publication volumes”. Accordingly, the rankings cannot be used to argue that publications in, say, medicine are “better” than publications in, say, philosophy. They cannot even be used to argue that publications by philosopher X are “better” than publications by philosopher Y. But they could, in principle, be used to argue that university X is producing, on average, “better” research than university Y, or that field or discipline A at university X is producing, on average, “better” research than field or discipline A at university Y. The fear is that the rankings will be misused in these respects.

For anyone interested in publishing monographs, it is important to have book publishers – not only journals – included in the Publication Forum rankings, but it is still unclear, for instance, whether the relative “weight” of a journal article (possibly in a high-ranked journal) and a comprehensive monograph (published, for instance, with a national press) can really be compared in an objective way. It seems that in the funding calculation model, one monograph will correspond to four journal articles (other things being equal, i.e., assuming there is no difference in the ranking level of their publication channels). Someone with a relatively traditionalist view could argue that this is not an entirely fair comparison. Typically, a substantial monograph requires much more work than a few articles. The single-authored monograph should maintain its crucial value as a critical synthesis of an individual scholar’s research and perspective on a focused topic; other

MONO

ways of publishing simply cannot replace the monograph, and the monograph arguably corresponds to much more than just a few articles.

Consider, by way of comparison, the Aristotelian account of the good life (or happiness, *eudaimonia*): it is a combination of a number of different elements, such as, e.g., the satisfaction of basic needs such as food and shelter, health and material resources (to some reasonable degree), social status and relations, family and friends, and so forth. If some of these is missing – if, for instance, a person is otherwise “well” but does not have any friends – the elements of good life that are well satisfied in that person’s life cannot compensate for the missing element (in this case, friends). Similarly, the multitude of academic publication channels ought to be celebrated, but not at the cost of sacrificing one of the most highly regarded traditional ways of publishing, that is, the monograph. The other ways of publishing cannot take its place without significantly impoverishing academic research.

It is, moreover, part of *academic freedom* – which should be maintained as a core value at any university, independently of different national and (inter)disciplinary contexts – to respect the publishing practices of different individuals and research fields. A junior scholar growing into academic maturity in the human sciences can be expected to produce an international monograph in order to fully enter her/his academic field; however, in special areas (e.g., within such sub-fields of philosophy as logic and philosophy of science), it is much more common nowadays to publish journal articles, and even leading researchers may not publish monographs. Many have worried that natural-scientific habits of research and publishing spread into the humanities and that advanced bibliometrics will have devastating effects on publishing in our fields. Such worries are understandable; it is, however, up to us ourselves as scholars, colleagues, and reviewers to determine whether the future of academic publishing will be a nightmare or will encourage genuine plurality and freedom. Utilizing all relevant information, such as the Publication Forum classifications (rightly understood), we should continue to read and critically evaluate *what is actually said in those publications*, however their channels are ranked. Otherwise we replace academic inquiry by uncreative indicator calculation.⁴

⁴ This view is defended in some more detail in Pihlström (2014). Cf. Pihlström (2011a) for a general reflection on some of the challenges that the humanities face today, and see Holm et al. (2014) for a recent report on the status of the humanities.

GRAPH

Publishing monographs in Finnish (and Swedish)

Before the results of the first round of classifications were made public, as many as sixty Finnish learned societies wrote an open letter to the Publication Forum project, arguing, among other things, that the rankings discouraged publishing in the two national languages of our country, Finnish and Swedish. This reaction was understandable, because it was based on a serious worry typical of small language communities: if we academics do not maintain “small” national languages as academic languages, then no one will, and such languages will then be impoverished and may not in the end be used for research and higher education at all. The Publication Forum was modified in response to this challenge: some leading *national* publication channels using Finnish and/or Swedish, especially in the humanities and social sciences, were ranked on level 2 instead of level 1.

This also had counterintuitive results, as some Finnish journals clearly got higher rankings than comparable international journals. Partly in the interest of avoiding such counterintuitive results, the “rules” of the game were again modified in 2013. In the second round of the rankings in 2014, only such national publication channels in which it is well motivated to publish top-quality research results – e.g., because of their national themes, such as Finnish history or literature – are ranked on level 2.

Another compromise was that the leading Finnish academic book publishers (which are doing excellent work – there is no doubt about that) were in 2011 ranked as high (among the best 10%) in the classification of book publishers as Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and other world-leading presses. In this sense, then, national languages clearly have not suffered in the Publication Forum rankings. On the contrary, some publication channels using Finnish instead of English or other world languages got higher rankings than they might have deserved in terms of mere academic quality. However, the book publishers’ rankings were reconsidered in 2014, as level 3 was introduced for them as well. No Finnish press any more made it to the very top. The leading publishers on level 3 are, unsurprisingly, mostly Anglo-American, but German and French academic presses are represented as well.

MONOLOGY

The death of the monograph – polemical views for and against

In recent decades, the crisis or even the death of the scholarly monograph has been frequently an issue in the discussions of the future of academic publishing. Those who don't like monographs call them highly specialized, short-run books that are targeted at small specialized audiences of scholars, and therefore cannot survive. On the other hand, in the humanities monographs (but also edited books) are still the most common type of publication. Different polemical arguments have been presented for and against the monograph, for example, as follows:

Yes, the monograph will survive. Why?

Traditional bedrock form

Monographs can be defended on the basis that they form a fundamental and traditional form for recording the results of scholarly inquiry. Some traditions are simply fundamental in the academic world, and being the heart of academic publishing and as old as academy itself the monograph must remain an essential part of academic publishing. And even more, in the midst of rapid changes and superficial knowledge, the stability, depth and slowness of the monograph and the deep thinking it requires are needed even more than before.

Permanence and lasting value for readers

Articles are important in rapidly changing fields where knowledge needs to be disseminated as soon as possible. Articles offer interpretations on highly specialized topics that are of current importance. Some humanistic and social-scientific disciplines, such as psychology, economics and criminology, rely heavily on journal publication as the principal form of research output (and most of the publications appear in English in these fields), whereas the monograph has always been central to the disciplines of history and law, for example. However, speed is usually not the main desideratum in the humanities or social sciences. The monograph allows the researcher to discuss issues that have long-lasting meaningfulness and that can at best be read by several succeeding generations. The monograph may be anticipated by journal articles, in which the idea is first tested and worked out in a more simple form, but the monograph allows the writer to focus on

MONOGRAPH

broader topics that relate the research question to larger historical frames, complicated theoretical systems or wide comparative perspectives, and this is something that articles cannot do. Even a sequence of articles on related topics cannot do this, because such a sequence will inevitably lack the kind of unity available in a monograph.

The value of a small audience

One argument against falling print runs and declining sales could be that the best and most original research is not read by masses, so why should scholars and academic presses search for big audiences? Isn't it enough to look for a handful of qualified readers who appreciate the thinking expressed in the monograph, which cannot and perhaps even should not be a bestseller? In economic terms this is problematic, of course, and publishers are looking for contributions and subjects that are of interest to a range of people. Humanistic or other academic research is sometimes blamed as being a cloistered type of knowledge addressed only to a privileged few. But one could claim that the most original research, which we should support by all means, is usually, perhaps always, written to a small audience.

Depth, richness and intellectual character

Monographs are based on the results of years of reflection, studying and trying to understand a complicated problem. Since there is such a breadth of information out there nowadays, such deep insights and thorough explorations are highly important. Although it has been sometimes stated that creating the best possible scholarly book is not a goal in itself, this is not entirely true. Although probably everyone thinks that intellectual output should be somehow useful to others, a well-thought publication may in fact be a goal in itself for scholars, since a strong intellectual motivation, the aim of conveying a body of complex ideas or a philosophical reflection in a book-length form may often be the main reason for writing a monograph. The monograph allows the scholar to develop complex arguments in an entirely different way than any other publication type or more popular forms of academic publishing. Best monographs do not merely reproduce old knowledge, as has sometimes been stated, but they push a discipline forward and include risky potential that is not merely the domain of new digital projects.

Career progression

While writing monographs often relies on intellectual motivations, its value has also been assessed in career-related terms. Some research has been done on the role of the monograph in academic appointments, and it seems that the monograph is still of great value in

MONONO

the humanities and social sciences for tenure and career progression. The monograph remains a major achievement in a scholar's career and serves the purposes of academic promotion. In fact, scholars often mention career promotion to senior academic posts as the most important reason for writing monographs (Williams et al. 2009). First monographs are often revisions of PhD theses, but it is notable that in Finland (as well as in some other Scandinavian countries) doctoral dissertations are often published before the doctoral defense (at least online or as print-on-demand, although often the dissertation is then reworked for an academic publisher). Monographs can influence the career developments of more senior scholars as well, at least in terms of international visibility, contacts and invitations.

No, the monograph will not survive. Why?

Economic reasons and visibility

Scholarly monographs have been criticized from different angles, but usually the criticism is based on economic grounds and business terms. The monograph has been called a luxury that society can no longer afford. Critics have proposed that the monograph is an expensive and economically unsustainable form of scholarly publication, because its fixed costs are high and have to be recovered from a small market base (Givler 2001). In some fields the actual sales are very low, and in general the monograph is primarily intended for the use of other scholars and specialists. While the sales are declining, the prices of the monographs are increasing (and publishers are reducing other costs, such as typesetting costs, or negotiating lower royalties, or introducing author fees). Often the principal market is institutional, and only libraries can nowadays purchase expensive monographs. However, library budgets have also been consumed by other products, periodicals and journal subscriptions, IT services, software and electronic products (Thompson 2005). While research libraries need to squeeze their budgets, monographs may become increasingly inaccessible to the majority of readers. In the US, for example, university presses were previously seen as integral part of the function of the university and they were supported economically by the universities and other funding bodies, but this support has decreased with the effect that publishers may prefer publishing on fashionable subjects that sell copies. .

One could argue that university presses should include monographs in their publishing programs, even though the form is economically burdening. Peter Givler (2001) has claimed that "we have an ethical responsibility not to allow short-term trends in university funding or the latest goofy fad in administrative thinking to drive us out of publishing work of such

GRAPH

fundamental and enduring cultural importance.” If we think that publishers should serve the scholarly community, then publishers can make losses with academic monographs but compensate these losses with more lucrative domains and more marketable books which have a broader appeal, such as textbooks for students or general non-fiction books. Monographs are published so that the researcher is taken seriously, and serious publications are also useful to publishers, since scholars still value and use (or at least cite) them. Moreover, an academic publisher that publishes high-quality monographs may also be taken more seriously as a publisher – and even its (academically speaking) less high-profile, and possibly better-selling, products may thereby be taken more seriously than they otherwise would be.

Some critics have talked about ‘tabloid scholarship’ and claimed that publishing houses are increasingly looking for titles that are somehow sensationalistic (and also searching for authors who are fast-moving and dynamic in appearance). Another major trend is that the author is increasingly involved in the marketing of her book through social media. Researchers are encouraged to use social media to announce new publications, talks and media appearances, or they use a range of web-based activities, such as research blogs, to develop and discuss the argument presented in the printed book (on the benefits of blog discussions as research tools and in the dissemination of research results, see Bouwma-Gearhart 2012). Dissemination of knowledge through books simply does not seem to suffice. In digital publishing in particular different roles are becoming fluid and multiple. One could sarcastically remark that the increasing importance of visibility means that scholars who focus more and more on their societal visibility have less and less time for (and perhaps also less interest in) engaging in time-consuming research. This has the inevitable consequence that the quality of academic publishing might suffer, and the importance of the scholarly monograph may thereby also decrease, since it is a slow and time-consuming form of publishing.

Static and old-fashioned

Some critics have proposed that printed monographs are static and old-fashioned forms of publishing and thinking, since they reproduce conservative practices of knowledge production and traditional scholars, who know the dominant discourses of making knowledge but who do not have the new multimodal capabilities and multiple literacies required in this age (Adema 2013). Writing monographs also takes time and requires longer funding, and while the publishing processes are rather long, at least books that are based on latest theories may become out-dated already during the publication process. Digital works can in principle be corrected and updated more easily than traditional printed

MONO

books. Those who see that monographs have become old-fashioned can also argue that research questions are more narrowly defined today and do not need to be addressed in monograph-length.

While speed is not a key criterion in traditional academic monograph publishing, it is increasingly a requirement that young scholars in particular need to take into account. When a post-doctoral researcher, for instance, is busily building up her/his academic career, s/he cannot just sit down and spend a decade writing a monograph. If s/he does, s/he may lose vital job opportunities. There are thus inevitable tensions regarding *time* in academic publishing – tensions between the needs of fast publishing, on the one side, and the need to think carefully, without hurry, about difficult problems, on the other side – no matter which publishing practices one primarily prefers.

It may be noted that the issue of speed was, somewhat prophetically, also raised by Mark C. Taylor and Esa Saarinen in *Imagologies: Media Philosophy* (1994), which predicted several features of contemporary academic culture already two decades ago. Their book (or “anti-book”, as they called it) even contains a chapter titled “Speed”. According to Taylor and Saarinen, we are (or were back then) moving from “the institutions of rational, systematic, uncommercial, analytic, supposedly value-free, unmediated, objective thought” to an age of electric media, in which “one-liners are everything”.⁵ While Taylor’s and Saarinen’s work may seem passé because of its uncritical celebration of postmodernist culture of “simulation” – fashionable in the 1980s rather than in 2010s – its encouragement to enter a culture of pure instrumentality with no “ends-in-themselves”, a culture in which “the essential is nothing, and nothing is essential” (“Simcult”, pp. 6–7), may sound like a (dystopic) prediction of what the world of scholarly publishing would look like in the 2010s (even though scholarly publishing as such is not substantially addressed in *Imagologies*, which focuses on general changes in culture).

Single vision or working collaboratively?

Monographs may be written by a single author or alternatively by many academic authors, but usually monographs have been associated with single authorship rather than with more collective or multi-authored writing. The text in this sense distinguishes itself from the work of all others. However, this goes against the major trends of the day, since in many fields multiple authorships and collaborative writing have increased in recent years (and are expected to increase in future). In natural sciences and medicine the experiments

⁵ Taylor and Saarinen (1994), chapter “Media Philosophy”, p. 5. (This book doesn’t have a pagination from the beginning to the end, thus also signifying the end of a coherent narrative.)

GRAPH

require large and often multidisciplinary research groups, and therefore publications are almost always co-authored. In the humanities and social sciences single-authored publications are still common, but multiple authorship is becoming more frequent (for some references, see the bibliography). The trend of collective authorship is related to the rise of multi- and interdisciplinary studies as well as to the development of new communication technologies, online knowledge-sharing and web-based publications, which are often created and maintained by multiple users. Collaboration also probably increases the number of publications and helps bring different types of expertise to a research group.

While working collaboratively has become fashionable, this has meant that researchers focus on other publication types than the monograph. The idea of expertise is changing and while (or if) expert-based work decreases, this also affects the popularity of the scholarly monograph, which is usually characteristically a work produced by a single expert in her field. Monograph connotes to oneness and solitariness, whereas 'multi' is the keyword in today's lexicon. Instead of a single perspective writing is produced by multiple authors, for example, in web-based fan communities where people write and maintain websites and other popular culture products together (see Hunter 2011). In this sense writing has become a social activity based on collective identities rather than on a single, monumental authorship. Collaborative writing and the digital humanities projects do not necessarily stand against traditional forms of publishing, but the different forms can be considered complementary. However, electronically and collectively generated literature is often based on the ideas of interaction and change, ephemeral and the present, and thus collaborative electronic publishing often deliberately challenges the traditional values of ownership, permanence and long-lasting authority.

However, it can also be doubted whether a group-thinking mentality always enhances knowledge building, and it should be carefully considered what collaboration means in terms of originality, creativity and the quality of research. Moreover, writing and thinking often require disengagement from other duties, networks and social contacts; researchers need peaceful and uninterrupted time and seclusion for their work (see Murray 2013).

It may be argued that while collaboration has always been part of humanistic research – since Plato's Socratic dialogues featuring several different "voices" – genuine co-authorship may still remain rather uncommon and can hardly become the main trend in the humanities.⁶ Moreover, it is not obvious that an increase in co-authored publications would enhance the quality of research in these fields. This is precisely because co-authored

⁶ This point was interestingly discussed by Dominic Scott in a talk at National Taiwan University, Taipei, in November, 2014. Cf. also Holm, Jarrick, & Scott (2014).

MONONO

publications (whether they are monographs or articles) inevitably lack the specifically human dimensions of a single individual perspective on the world. While something valuable is perhaps added through co-authorship, something else may be lost. It would, therefore, be overhasty to maintain that scientific progress in the humanities and social sciences could be measured in terms of increases in co-authored publications, even though in natural-scientific publishing, in particular, internationally co-authored articles may have more impact in comparison to publications lacking international co-authorship.

Societal and national impact

Societal impact, useful networks and visibility in society and in the media have become increasingly important as academic merits. However, writing international monographs does not often bring about national visibility. Monographs are academic publications targeted for international audiences and intended primarily for use by other scholars, whereas societal impact is usually taking place on a national level and instead of expert audiences it concerns non-academic groups and stakeholders. Thus, monographs may not have much societal impact, since such relevance is usually looked at on a national level: “Policy makers are more likely to prioritize usage on a national level as a way to measure the return on investments in science done by national governments” (Snijder 2013).

Those monographs that have large societal impact are usually concerned with national topics. However, it should be noted that in Finland publishing for non-academic audiences is very common and important in the humanities. Many scholars publish textbooks and general non-fiction books for larger and multiple audiences. Moreover, according to the report on Finnish academic publishing in 1998–2005 (Puuska & Miettinen 2008) a majority of scholarly monographs (58%) were published in Finland (although one might think that the number of international publishing is or at least should be increasing), and the share of monographs in the whole number of academic publications was only 2%.⁷

Maybe. But in a different format as electronic publications.

One common claim is that the monograph can survive, but the digital age requires that monographs appear in a different format as electronic publications. Monographs can still be traditionally written and follow traditional academic narrative and argumentative forms and structures, although they are published electronically. The advantages of

⁷ This low percentage is hardly surprising, however, because articles in the natural sciences are often very short – only a few pages – and the sheer length of the monograph inevitably entails a low number of them in comparison to the immense numbers of articles that are produced.

GRAPH

electronic publications for the user are that they are easier to search, easily accessible to wider audiences, cheaper and portable, whereas the advantages of the hardcopy include its aesthetic and historical appeal, the ability of browsing and longevity (Williams et al. 2009). Open-access can make monographs more accessible to the public, and open access publications are vital especially in countries where financial resources are limited.⁸

But the new forum can also change the whole poetics of writing, and along with this development the idea of the book is changing. Some critics complain that traditional academic publishing systems objectify and commodify knowledge, whereas the book that is published in the digital form only is no longer just a published object, but it becomes more like a process of different 'writerly' and 'readerly' activities and interaction (see Potts 2014). The digital tries to move focus from product-based market to something that foregrounds conversation rather than consuming products or ownership. The digital forms of publication can also provide access to large quantities of material and allow the book to be more than a traditional narrative. A computer-generated or born-digital monograph can become a database, which can incorporate vast bodies of (supplementary) material and consist of a variety of texts rather than of a single text. The additional material can include non-textual material, illustrations, audio files and music, video and film clips, data sets and databases, whole libraries of secondary reference and archival material, related essays, critics and reviews, and different search tools. The new techniques are also useful to textual editions, since it is possible to include various editions and text versions in the same publication or illustrate errors, highlight emendations and expose textual changes in the text. Hyperlinks enhance the possibilities of narrative, and by using hyperlinks it is possible to make the referential function and intertextual character of the work visible. Hyperlinks offer different pathway choices or parallel narratives to the reader, and the combination of text, images, colour and sound produces multimodal narratives which give new opportunities to interaction between reader and book or reader and writer through a touch-screen. The literary scholar Stanley Fish (2012) has argued that "... the effect of these technologies is to transform a hitherto linear experience — a lone reader facing a stable text provided by an author who dictates the shape of reading by doling out information in a sequence he controls — into a multi-directional experience in which voices (and images) enter, interact and proliferate in ways that decenter the authority of the author who becomes just another participant." The book in this sense is no longer understood

⁸ On monographs and open access, see the following report: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/year/2015/monographs/> (Crossick 2015). See also Dávidházi (2014) and Eve (2014).

MONO

as a completed original product, but more like a process produced in collaboration and characterized by remix, alteration and sharing.

This also entails a change in the habits of reading; it has been frequently stated that the new reading audience which has grown in the digital age is no longer used to the linear, text-based reading associated with the monograph, but prefers browsing visual and multimodal contents. Digital literature can make several possible argumentative lines visible and allows the reader to test different routes of navigating through the text. Of course, a traditional monograph can also inspire different interpretations and, on the other hand, electronic literature which consists of multiple possible plotlines can be rather demanding to the reader, since it requires endless efforts and interest in experimenting with the different combinations and pathways of the text.

Moreover, digital projects are usually not based on single authorship. By making use of digital platforms and tools it is possible to develop new research practices, which are based on sharing, openness and collaboration. Critics see the digital as a potential of changing old conservative practices of producing knowledge and encouraging interaction between authors and their public. Some scholars have considered the digital humanities as a political act, in which scholarly knowledge based on authorities is replaced by a more democratic conversation between scholars and the broader audience. Future monographs can also change in other ways. One major trend is that monographs become less scholarly, less specialized and more popular, focusing on more general overviews.

How to measure impact?

A couple of words can still be added about how to measure impact, because researchers are repeatedly encouraged to monitor their impact. The quality of individual scholars has been assessed in terms of prizes, scholarly positions and international influence, whereas the research output can be assessed by using, for example, review documents and bibliometric indicators. Some studies have been looking for alternative ways of measuring impact, for example, by studying how the use of monographs can indicate impact (see Snijder 2013). In addition to calculating citations it is possible to measure impact by 'libcitations', where the number of academic libraries which hold a certain book is used in the measuring of impact. In this sense a book that is acquired to a larger number of libraries is considered to have more impact than a book that is in fewer libraries. Snijder (2013) suggests that online usage and the number of downloads (opening a web page, downloading a document) may be another better indicator of impact than citations. The problem here is that opening a

MONOGRAPH

website or browsing a book does not yet indicate that the source has actually been used or that it has had any deeper influence on the reader.

The societal impact of monographs has not been much studied, but some studies (see Snijder 2013) have shown that monographs in social sciences enjoy a relatively large readership outside academia, and humanistic monographs are not exclusively used by scholars. A large part of all usage comes from non-academics, although this is difficult to measure, since the groups that benefit from humanistic monographs are not always known. But it seems obvious that those subjects that are bound to national borders have more societal impact, whereas their value in the traditional academic sense may not be as high. Publishing in English or other international languages is important also because it contributes to the international cooperation and leads to co-publishing with international colleagues.

The dissertation: from monographs to bunches of articles?

For an early career scholar in particular, it is extremely important to consider very carefully the publishing options one has; they could define one's future career. In most cases, one's first publications are in a way or another related to one's doctoral dissertation, through which one matures into academic independence and becomes a scholar. Today young scholars face the choice of submitting their PhD thesis either as a monograph or as a bunch of separately published articles. The future of the monograph hardly depends on this choice alone, but it could turn out to be a major factor in the development of the monograph as a publishing form.

Both choices are well motivated. A dissertation consisting of articles reaches the relevant academic audiences in many cases more easily than a monograph, which at the PhD defense stage would typically be published in an obscure university series or merely as an e-thesis on a website. On the other hand, if one revises one's PhD thesis into a full-blown academic monograph, that could be one's entry into the international scholarly community of one's field. Clearly, it crucially depends on the specific sub-field and topic one works on which publishing options are ideal and which aren't. When the doctoral dissertation is converted into a more accessible and inviting academic book or monograph, this usually requires some reworking. The introduction no longer needs to include long explanations or justifications for methodologies, and very detailed reviews of previous literature in the field are usually unnecessary. Abundant formal citations of what others

MONO

have previously said and other pedantic signs of learnedness should also be modified or removed.

Those doctoral candidates who write articles and then defend a thesis on the basis of them may be seen as having a stronger publishing record, because immediately as young PhDs they will then already have published a certain number of scholarly papers (plus the thesis based on them). However, it varies significantly from one case to another whether this speeds up the building of an academically serious track record. In some areas of the humanities at least, a “big book” is still needed as an indication of scholarly maturity. For most young scholars, that big book is no longer the doctoral dissertation. But it needs to be written at some point.

For a young scholar, the supervisor’s views on these matters may be decisive. And today’s doctoral students are tomorrow’s professors supervising future generations. In this sense, the future of the monograph may also depend on relatively concrete decisions made within graduate schools and doctoral programs. Working in graduate schools definitively makes the dissertation writing process easier, since writing a doctoral thesis in isolation is often demanding and it is important to offer possibilities for students to become members of a scholarly community.

The virtues of traditional monograph narrative?

Some critics think that electronic publications will lead to richer forms of scholarship, whereas others maintain that the type of thinking and narrating which the monograph entails is still needed. Illustrated books were formerly addressed mainly to children, and some of us may still think that serious adult literature does not need to include illustrations or printed images. This view is admittedly rather conservative and seems outdated in today’s visual culture, but we might for a while seriously consider the virtues of traditional scholarly narrative – what might these virtues be?

As was mentioned above, digital monographs have many advantages but the type of knowledge they offer is different from that in printed monographs. One could argue that databases and multimodal books often offer mere raw material, ordered data or descriptive content, rather than sophisticated and sustained arguments or well-ordered and articulated content which would help us make sense of the world. One of the main advantages of traditional monographs is that they involve a serious effort of interpreting, analysing and structuring a complex content. Multiplicity of perspectives that is so much emphasized today can also be offered by a single author, but this is perhaps not the main

MONOGRAPH

virtue of single-authored monographs. We could argue that there is something very fundamentally human precisely in the singularity of perspective that the monograph entails: The singularity of perspective is ultimately based on the *finitude of human life* as we know it.

Monographs do not offer mere content that could be easily replaced by more efficient forms of content delivery. Rather, they offer insights. At least some of us still long for such deep and serious insights that can only be offered by single authors who have been trying to understand a complex problem for years. (And even if only some, or relatively few, of us do, that is still valuable.) Knowledge in this sense is more than mere data or information, but it involves attempts to provide theories and arguments that will help us understand complex phenomena which can only be addressed in the form of an extended text. Monographs can also make original discoveries about the world and elaborate on these discoveries in detail. Part of the length of the monograph comes from the theoretical background and previous literature in which the writer situates her argument. The author of the monograph is never completely isolated and the text is never entirely her own, but she is situated in the web of previous knowledge that shapes comprehension, and the argument takes shape against this background. Monograph offers a space to provide a large historical and theoretical context and thus it is likely to provide deeper and broader views than short forms of publishing can do.

Linearity in writing and reading has also been associated with monographs, since they usually proceed from an introduction to a conclusion. But what does the alleged linearity actually mean? Linearity does not necessarily mean simplicity, since it sometimes takes a great deal of hard effort to make such long linear structures. Complex scholarly arguments are not easily reduced to simple plot structures. One could compare scholarly monographs to ancient classics, which are often based on simple plot lines and few characters, but they are deeply concerned with fundamentally human themes and thus their apparent simplicity turns out to be misleading.

Stanley Fish has some years ago argued that those who think that the digital form will liberate us as writers and readers from the linear and temporal medium are actually relying on a theological vision. According to this religious and digital vision, the new forms of communication will create knowledge that is not produced by a limited human being; instead, these new forms take us “into a spatial universe where knowledge is everywhere available in a full and immediate presence to which everyone has access as a node or relay in the meaning-producing system” (Fish 2012). In this new system, “the self exchanges its limited, fallen perspective for the perspective (not a perspective at all) of union with deity, where there is no distance between the would-be knower and the object of his cognitive

MONONO

apprehension because, in Milton's words, everyone and everything is 'all in all.'" This vision aims to challenge one fundamental feature of human beings – *mortality*. Human beings are not capable of going on without end, and this limited nature also characterizes human knowledge, but the digital vision – at least in its extreme forms – relies on an opposite notion, namely, that there is mere movement and expansion, no beginning or end.

Good monographs are not discrete pieces of data (or at least should not be), but they try to turn a thought into a gem and produce a polished narrative which has a progressive and accumulative character. Monographs typically do not offer an infinite number of stories by using multiple paths, but they try to form a more or less coherent story. This may fail, but engaging in an argument always carries with it the possibility that the statements one subscribes to, or the beliefs one maintains, may be false, and the argument based on them may be invalid or unsound.

Moreover, electronic publications and databases are also produced in order to bring new products and devices to the market, and thus they are also part of the profit-driven publishing systems. This economic motivation is one reason for creating new kinds of publications. The Finnish satirist Markku Toivonen noted in his satirical collection of stories entitled *Ihmisenveistäjät* (2011) that the book is a medieval and old-fashioned concept as long as the book can only be read. Therefore, the marketing people are in Toivonen's stories at pains to develop publications that can be used in multiple ways, including creating tasty books for eating or using the pages of the printed book for smoking as if they were cigarettes.

As John B. Thompson (2005) has argued, narratives and monographs require an extended period of time and patience to read. Although monographs can also be read selectively and by using indices for browsing, perhaps the experience of reading a whole single text can offer such complete views that become valuable in an age in which information is offered in small bits and pieces of data. Reading books of course presupposes that scholars still must have enough time to read comprehensive extended texts that require immersion and a real intellectual engagement. Therefore, academic institutions cherishing the most traditional core values of universities, such as institutes for advanced study, may become increasingly important in the future as contexts within which monograph publishing can still flourish. The key purpose of institutes for advanced study – including the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies, whose monograph output is on display – is, precisely, to give their (typically very rigorously selected) fellows free time for penetrating, self-directed, long-term research that does not seek to avoid thinking as deeply and carefully as possible about the most difficult problems there are.

MONOGRAPH

Conclusion

As argued above, the monograph is more than merely the sum of its chapters, which could exist as separate articles. This idea of the monograph as something “more” is ultimately related to the basic tasks of the university and the academic community. When writing and publishing a monograph, a scholar is not just reporting the results of her/his research (which would in some sense then exist independently of that monograph and would only be “reported” in the form of the monograph). S/he is, much more profoundly, opening a unique individual and personal perspective on the world s/he is studying, showing how the world can be viewed from such a perspective that no one else occupies. In this sense, the monograph has not only a scholarly but (we might say) an existential function. It shows its readers how the world – in some specific respect – appears to someone with a deep concern to understand it. To some extent, the world’s appearing in such a significant way can be communicated in a journal article, too, but in many cases a more comprehensive narrative form is required for adequate communication. This is why monographs, in something like their classical form, will be needed even if the methods of their technological production may immensely change in the future.

MONONO

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