

Publish Your Book

[Introductions and Welcome Remarks from Judy Singer]

AMY BRAND: I'm Amy Brand. I'm Assistant Provost for Faculty Appointments. We're really thrilled with the turnout today from across the university. We do a series of cross-university faculty development events, professional development events for faculty every year. And it's great to see how popular they've been.

This event is jointly sponsored by the Senior Vice Provost Office for Faculty Development and Diversity, as well as the Faculty of Arts and Sciences' own FD&D office, and first professor Judith Singer, who is Senior Vice Provost, would like to say a few words of welcome. And then Professor Michele Lamont from FAS will follow and introduce our opening speaker, Bob Darnton.

JUDITH SINGER: Thank you very much, Amy. This is a wonderful event that has exceeded our wildest expectations. When we dream up faculty development events, we try to put ourselves-- I am a faculty member, but we try to put ourselves in the shoes of faculty members, and think about what would be particularly useful for faculty as they navigate their professional careers. And one of the things that is particularly striking about this event is we have representation from every school at Harvard, so from engineering to the medical school, to the School of Public Health, business school from across the river, to FAS. We have a large representation, but every single school is represented.

And the other thing that I think is particularly wonderful is we have first-year assistant professors here, and we have people with very long titles because they have been at the university a long time. So this clearly has struck a chord, both across the disciplines, across the schools, and across the various stages of professional development. And I think that's because it speaks to a very real point about our academic lives, which is we are interested in sharing our ideas, both with our colleagues and with the outside world, and books provide one venue for doing this.

I'm going to turn this over in one second to my partner in crime, Michele Lamont, Senior Advisor on Faculty Development and Diversity in FAS. But I'm going to leave you with a

question, which is the question I ask anybody who says they're writing a book-- why? I have written three books. I'm in the midst, supposedly, of writing a fourth. And the number of times people say, well, because-- and then there's no answer.

So I think one of the questions that I'm hoping our speakers will be able to address, and that you'll also be able to think about for yourself is, why do you want to do this, and what are you trying to accomplish? And I think that's a question that we too rarely ask ourselves, as professors. So let me turn it over to someone who has written many books, and maybe can answer that question, Michelle Lamont.

MICHELE LAMONT: Judy has asked, why, oh, why do we write books? And today we're going to talk about the context in which we write these books. All of us who've been writing books for a number of years know how much we are operating in an environment that is in constant state of change.

And the question of how do we frame our books in this changing environment is becoming a more and more burning question, because we want to continue to write books that are very meaningful to us, and we need also to figure out how to write them so that it is easy to, frankly, diffuse them. Not only diffuse them, but sell them. And we're very lucky here that we have experts to help us answer this question. And our first expert is a longtime friend and mentor of mine, our colleague, Robert Darnton, who is a director of the libraries who moved here a few years ago.

When I was a first-year assistant professor at Princeton in 1997, shortly after I arrived on campus, we had lunch, and he invited me to teach in the European cultural studies program that he was then chairing. And it became one of the most important experiences for me, as a young academic. I was thrilled to be part of this unbelievable community that had been built by Carl Schorske that included Tony Grafton. So I've always remained very grateful to Bob for this, and even extremely thrilled when he decided to move here.

We all know that he's one of the most thoughtful voices when it comes to the transformation of the publishing industry in the US. He has many credential that make him so. He has written

several essays in the New York Review of Books. He has talked about his last book, titled The Case for Books, Past, Present, and Future. It's very germane to our concern today.

When he was president of the American Historical Association, he created the Gutenberg-e program for publishing electronic monographs. He's been a trustee for the last 15 years of Oxford University Press, and he has also served as a trustee of the New York Public Library. So without further ado, please join me in welcoming Bob, who will speak for 15 minutes or so, and then we're going to have a Q&A. He's going to have to leave, because he's teaching at 1:00. So we're partly grateful that he's agreed to do this.

[APPLAUSE]

BOB DARNTON: Well, thank you, Michele. This subject-- I care more about the subject than almost anything except my grandchildren. It's very dear to my heart, but it's dear to your hearts as well. I mean we are book people, but books are in trouble. And there is going to be maybe a slightly-- not an Elijiac tone, but a Jeremiac tone to what I have to say.

I do have to teach at 1:00, and I wish I could stay for all of the discussion, but I can't. So I will gallop, and in galloping, I may simplify. But what I thought I'd do, at least to get the general discussion going, would be to take as my theme a buzzword that at least I hear almost everywhere I go in the book world, and that is-- brace yourselves-- sustainability.

I would like to try to describe three encounters I have had with sustainability, in the hopes that that might provoke something of a discussion. The first one took place, well, in the mid-1990s, and it involved a vicious circle, which I think is familiar to everybody here, so I won't pause over it too long. But it became clear to me when I was then, actually, chair of the Princeton University Library Committee, that we were suffering from inflation in the price of periodicals. And the upward drift in periodical prices was exerting a heavy toll, because it meant that libraries were cutting back on their purchases of monographs.

There were some, like the library at the University of Washington, that used to spend 50% on periodicals, 50% on monographs. The balance shifted, and they were spending 80% on periodicals. And some libraries actually stopped buying monographs-- virtually stopped by

monographs altogether. So this crisis hit university presses, as you know, and it became virtually impossible to publish monographs in many fields. And because of that impossibility, it became very difficult for graduate students in those fields to have careers, so there was a kind of vicious circle about the whole thing.

And my attempt to-- a very small attempt to address this was a creation of the Gutenberg-e program when I was president of the American Historical Association. The basic idea was to try to create a new kind of book, an electronic book, to legitimate it by choosing the best PhD dissertations, giving them as much backing as we possibly could, and selling them on the market. Kate Wittenberg, who's here, who will speak later to you, can give you lots more details about it.

The main point I want to say is that when I applied for funding to the Mellon Foundation, they loved the idea, but their first question rather took me aback. They said, what is your business plan? And honest, I'd never heard the word before. And I thought, I'm a scholar, I'm not a businessman.

Well, that was the beginning of my education. And in the end, I think we produced a very fine list of electronic monographs. But did our business plan, such as it was, succeed?

Well, there's been some debate about that. You can ask Kate. I think we pretty well broke even, and we could have made a go of it. But the Columbia University Press, the publisher of all of this, was having trouble with its business plan, and we looked too risky to it. So after seven years of, I would say, intellectual success, Gutenberg-e was folded, and now is part of an open access mechanism at the American Council of Learned Society, called Humanities-e.

Encounter number two. While occupied with this problem Gutenberg-e, of course, I noticed that the difficulties in the vicious circle were getting more vicious. But I ran into another problem which all of you, I'm sure, have encountered as well, and that's when I came here to Harvard and we began trying to address the problem of inflation of prices, especially of journals. How could you do anything about it if you were the library that bought most of the journals?

Well, we faced an obvious predicament that sounds so irrational, it's unbelievable. But everyone in this room, I think, has experienced it. We, the scholars, do the research. We, the scholars, write up the articles. We, the scholars, referee the articles.

We serve on the editorial boards. Many of us are editors of journals. And then we buy back these journals at outrageous prices. Not ourselves, of course. We don't reach into our own pockets. We expect the library to buy it.

So there is something, I would say, wildly irrational about the whole system. And we have been working hard on ways to stop this spiral, this upward spiral. The first idea was, let's do a better job of negotiating with the publishers.

Well, I could give you a long song and dance about that. We've been looking into it in great detail in the library implementation work group, about which you may have heard, and we've come to a sad conclusion. We can't really out-negotiate the publishers.

It's not just that they are smarter than we are. They have a kind of boot camp for training their agents in negotiation. They get sharper every year. But basically, if you try to say, well, I'm not going to pay \$30,000 for a subscription to one of the-- I won't mention the journal, but there are several that cost \$30,000-- they say, fine, it's a free market, you can cancel your subscription. But meanwhile, the subscriptions of other journals that you wanted to buy from the same publisher mysteriously go up, and the result is the same price. They aim at a certain income in dollars, and they get it, no matter how much you try to negotiate your way out of what they call bundles.

I won't go into details. But basically, the conclusion is, if you want to escape from this, you have to cancel all of your subscriptions with one publisher, not just work at it journal by journal. And that is virtually impossible, because many students, and especially faculty members, are not willing for us to walk away from the table. So we're in a very tough spot.

What are we trying to do, then, in order to correct things? Well, we've made several measures. One is the open access resolution that all of you have debated, and the point is that our production in the form of articles, on the part of all of the faculties now, or almost all of them, should be made available free to the rest of the world.

So we have an open access repository, and it is, I think, quite a hit. More than 30% already of the faculty in Arts and Sciences have deposited articles. That's really a very large percentage compared with previous attempts to do this, where the high point was 4%. So I think it's working, I think it's spreading, and it will influence the world of learning.

A second measure is something we call Hope. We are trying to subsidize costs at the production end of journals, instead of paying for them at the consumption end. And so any Harvard professor can receive up to \$1,000 a year to subsidize the production costs of journals, of articles in an open access journal. We hope that gradually this will spread and will improve things.

And thirdly, we're trying to educate the faculty. We need to raise faculty consciousness about the severity of this problem. And frankly, I hope that more faculty members will refuse to write for the journals that charge extortionate prices, will refuse to do peer review for them, refuse to serve on their editorial boards, and that we will have a gradual shift in the ecology of journal publishing.

Meanwhile, though, what about books? Well, in April of 2003, a friend of mine, Walter Lippincott, who was then the director of the Princeton University Press, said that of the 82 university presses then in existence, 25 would cease to exist five years later. Well, they're still around. It's remarkable how few university presses have gone under.

Now, they've adapted their strategy to the new conditions. Many of them are publishing so-called middle list books. Many publish books about local color, about birds, about cooking. They're moving into a rather non-scholarly dimension, but they haven't gone under. They're surviving. And many actually published monographs, so maybe things aren't quite so bad.

And the great glimmer of hope is something that has been emphasized a lot by Jason Epstein, and something you can see. Maybe you have seen it, if you cross Massachusetts Avenue and look in the window of the Harvard Bookstore. Namely, the Espresso Book Machine. Have many of you have seen it so far? I don't know.

But it's a remarkable machine. You type in the title of a book you want to buy. The message is instantly transmitted to a digital database, where the text of that book is preserved. The text

comes back, it's printed, it's attached to a paperback cover, all within four minutes, and often for a cost that is under \$10. The price varies according to the publisher.

So what this is doing is it's eliminating crucial stages in the production-consumption mechanism. There is no warehousing. There are no transportation costs.

And best of all, there are no returns. No returns. Returns kill publishers. The famous word of Alfred Knopf was "Gone today, here tomorrow," about his books.

[LAUGHTER]

Returns are just killing publishers, and this is one way to eliminate that problem. Encounter number three with the problem of sustainability has to do with, again, the question of business plans, because somehow I found myself confronting the most spectacular business plan I've ever heard of. Namely, Google Book Search, and Google in general.

There's something new about the way Google treats books. No need for me to go into it in a lot of detail. They don't actually use the word books all that much. They talk about content. And what they want to do, of course, is to maximize content in a gigantic database, in which they claim they will someday have all the books in the world, and to make money from it. They make money from it by advertising that is connected with the searches that are done, thanks to this database, but especially by charging for something they call an institutional book subscription.

So again, you wonder about the rationality of all of this, but they come to great research libraries and say, won't you let us digitize your books for free? Actually, it's not all that free, because we have paid at Harvard enormous costs in handling. But we don't pay for the digitisation.

And then they say, and wouldn't you like to buy back digitized copies of your books, along with those of your sister libraries, at a price that we will determine? I think this is not a great idea. Many people don't agree with me, but it does involve a terrific business plan. It is sustainable. If Google gets its way, they will make a pile of money, and they will share some of that money with authors and publishers.

But what about readers? What about the public? What about the basic goal of libraries, which is to get books to readers?

The goal of Google is to make money for the people who own its shares. And that fundamental contradiction has got to work itself out, one way or the other. It's, of course, being worked out in the courts, because in this country, we don't legislate so much through our elected representatives. We legislate by hiring lawyers to battle it out in the court system. And in this case, as you know, the settlement is now being considered by Judge Chin in the Southern District Court for the District of New York, and his decision will to a considerable extent determine the landscape of the world of learning in the future.

Now, the bets are, as I've heard them most recently, that he will turn down the settlement. And he's got lots of good reasons to do so, including reasons provided by the Department of Justice, which has filed two-- not one, but two-- memoranda against the settlement. And I think the terms of the second memorandum are so severe that Google would not accept them, and therefore, the settlement may well be turned down.

And if that happens, suddenly everything's unraveling, and everything's up for grabs. In my opinion, we will be in a very interesting, fluid moment when we can rearrange things. How can we do that?

I'm coming to the end of my 15 minutes, I think, so I would like to insert a commercial. Let us create a national digital library, one that will outdo what Google is doing, and that will provide a magnificent database of our patrimony, the heritage of world literature, free to all the citizens of this country, and indeed, to the rest of the world. Now, that sounds great, I know. You might say, where's the business plan? How are we going to do this?

Well, not easy. We need lots of things, and I can just mention some. Congressional legislation about so-called orphan books. I would like Congress to actually subsidize the whole thing. And we could begin by digitizing the Library of Congress, more than 20 million books right there, which is almost twice what Google Book Search has now. And while they're at it, why not digitize all the books in the Harvard University Library, and the New York Public University

Library, and other university libraries that have not simply turned over their entire stock to Google?

Well, OK, it may sound like a pipe dream. But we are working on it, and I don't see why this couldn't happen. We'll calculate costs, we'll try to build up support, and I hope we'll do it. Will this solve all the other problems, the problems that all of you face when you're trying to write books-- not just the why question, but the how question? No, I think not.

And so I may not have arrived at a satisfactory conclusion. I don't think I have an answer of sustainability, except to say it should be, I guess the Germans would say, aufgehoben. It should be absorbed into a much larger matter, which is the redesigning of the whole world of learning.

I think we're at a moment when that republic of learning, as it was called in the Age of Enlightenment, is being fundamentally changed. And that we ought to try to insert ourselves in this change, and make the whole system work for the public good, and not just the private profit. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

AMY BRAND: So I'm not going to go through long introductions for all the speakers, because we don't have that much time. But let me just say that there is an incredible wealth of editorial and scholarly publishing expertise here. In Elizabeth, we have the Senior Editor of Behavioral Sciences, Law, and Education at Harvard University Press, and she will go first. Followed by Gita, who is now Editorial Director at MIT Press, and worked for many years in promotions and marketing capacity there.

Followed by Kate Wittenberg, who is now a project director at ITHAKA, but was formerly editor in chief at Columbia University Press, and as Bob mentioned, is a real innovator in electronic publishing. Followed by Susan Rabiner, who-- and I hope you do refer to their bios-- was formerly Editorial Director at Basic Books, worked at Oxford University Press, and many years ago founded her own literary agency. So she'll give us the agent's perspective on the issues that we're talking about.

ELIZABETH KNOLL: I tried to boil down everything I know and believe into the shortest terms possible. I often say to authors that every author has to be able to answer the Rabbi Hillel challenge. As you may know, Rabbi Hillel, the great scholar, was once challenged by some smart alec to summarize the wisdom of the Torah while standing on one foot.

So Rabbi Hillel stood on one foot, said, "Do not do unto others that which would be uncomfortable for yourself," and put his foot down. So if Rabbi Hillel can do this, and if I ask my authors to do it, I should be able to do it too. So I have decided that there are two basic rules for writing proposals and for dealing with publishers. Everything follows from these two basic rules when you're writing a book. And the book, in this case, can be the 6 by 9 inch object made out of wood pulp that we all know and love, or it can be some new e-version which is as yet being developed.

The two rules are-- know what you want to say, and why. And the second rule is, say it so that the person or people you're saying it to can hear it, and want to hear it. Both of these rules sound really boneheaded and simple. But they must be a lot harder than they sound, because would-be authors so often break them, and break them in several ways, and with extraordinary speed. For instance, here's an inquiry that I got on Monday from someone I had never met and never heard of.

"Hi, Elizabeth. I obtained your name and email from"-- an author I'd worked with a couple of years ago-- "and I'm wondering if you could send me your phone number so I could discuss a book project I have in the works with you. I have an offer to publish this book with Oxford University Press, but I'm considering making a switch. I have published previous books with MIT Press, Cambridge University Press, and Kluwer. Signed, John Jones"-- not his real name, obviously-- "University Professor."

His university website explains that this is an honor given to only 13 people in the history of his university. So I answered, "Dear Professor Jones, I'm going to be embroiled in our fall sales conference for the next few days, so I'll be hard to reach by phone for the rest of the week. Can you tell me a little about the book, where things stand with OUP, and why you are restless? Simply as a matter of courtesy to the editors there, I'm reluctant to swoop in at the 11th hour on

something they've invested time and thought in, so I'd like to know more. With best wishes, Elizabeth Knoll."

To which he answered, Dear Elizabeth, let me start with the book itself, because I want to make sure you are the right editor to talk to before getting into the rest of this. The book provides a general alternative to a currently influential school of thought in his field, called his theory. It includes chapters on seven intellectually and politically big topics, from the economic crises of the last few years to climate change, to show how the theory has implicitly already influenced scholarship and how it might contribute more. If you were the right editor for the book, I'll answer your remaining questions. If not, perhaps you could give me full contact information for the appropriate editor. No signature.

You see what I mean about these simple rules being hard for some otherwise very intelligent people. So the first rule, know what you want to say and why, is for writing a proposal. The second, say it in a way that the person you're saying it to can hear it, is for communicating with an editor and a publisher. And both the rules apply to the writing of the book itself.

So about the proposal. The first thing is be sure your idea really needs to be a book. Professionally and substantively, an article or a series of articles in the right journals for your field might, in fact, serve you just as well, and be a lot easier in many ways. A book, after all, has to be an object that is sold. That means it has to be something that someone wants or needs enough to plunk down money for.

That means it has to be captivating. It has to provide entertainment, information, or both. And as you probably are aware, there are alternative sources for information and entertainment, especially among the young. But not exclusively among the young. You probably saw the headline in The Onion a week or so ago. "Nation shudders at large block of uninterrupted text."

[LAUGHTER]

So a proposal has to describe a book. And not only describe a book-- it has to make a case for a book, and make a case for the book for the defined audience. I often say, quoting an editor I

knew many years ago, that every book has to answer the satyr question. How is this book different from all other books?

And the follow-up question is, why does that matter, and to whom does that matter? What are you giving the intended audience that they need? Do they already know they need it? It helps if they do, because then you've got a winner. But quite often, they don't know they need it, and so you have to persuade them that they do, in the proposal and, in effect, in the book itself, but that's down the line.

In the packets that are around for you, there are guidelines to writing proposals from both us and from MIT Press. So I won't go through all of this. The guidelines sort of describe what publishers are looking for, and I think our two guidelines probably agree in many ways. They will ask you to say why you're writing this particular book at this particular time in your career and in the field, who it's for, why it's for them, why it matters.

The guidelines will ask you to go into some detail about nuts-and-bolts questions-- length, apparatus, time it takes to write the book, and the like. But the important point about all guidelines for writing proposals is that the main theme is that, at every point, you should put yourself in your audience's place. It helps, of course, to know who your audience is. If your audience is your colleagues in your field, it's fairly straightforward.

If you want to write for the proverbial general reader, the smart, curious person outside the academy, it's probably a good idea to know some non-academics. You could even ask one of them to read your proposal. Or better yet, let you read it to them. If they start to look at you like this, that's a sign that you need to rewrite. And Susan will tell you in detail how to rewrite. Susan has written a whole book, which I recommend to everybody, for writing for the proverbial general intelligent reader.

For the finished proposal, though, your first audience is the editors at your chosen publisher. So do some initial research on possible publishers when you're trying to think about selecting that first audience. Who has published the books in your field like the ones you want to write, for the audience you have in mind? Bear in mind that textbook publishers, trade publishers, and of course, university presses and other scholarly publishers, do different kinds of things.

If you're interested in writing a trade book, you probably shouldn't go to a textbook publisher. If you're interested in writing a book in, say, French history, you might think that the University of California Press would be a wonderful place to do it, because they did a wonderful list of many years in French history. But they haven't, in fact, published much in French history for the last 15 years.

Harvard University Press used to do books in psychoanalysis. We don't anymore. So look at your shelves. Look at the shelves of your friends and your colleagues and your advisors for the books that are in your field, or are of the kind of book you want to do.

But make sure they're fairly current, because things change. Lists change all the time. Part of the reason I have a title as long as I do, with all these fields, is that Harvard Press' lists are changing, and my work reflects that.

When you're thinking about a publisher, don't focus too much on hierarchy of publishers, on what's the top publisher generally, or on a name, or what's the second from the top. Think about what is the best press for your purposes, your book. It's really an ecological question, and much less a hierarchical question. A pronghorn antelope is a wonderful animal, but it wouldn't do well in the Everglades. Your literary classics monograph might be wonderful, but it's not going to be published or do well at Springer-Verlag, which specializes in scientific and technical work.

Think about what's best for your book, for your subject, and for the audience. And keep in mind what your goal is. For most academics, the real goal is to be published by a press that will work with you well, and that will get your book to the colleagues and the audiences that you want to read it. Your goals are really primarily professional and intellectual, not financial.

There are many, many easier ways of making money than by writing a book. Many.

[LAUGHTER]

The chances are you are not going to make any serious money from this enterprise. There are, of course, some academics who have. And I feel personally annoyed by some of them, and I have

said as much to some of them, because they have inflated the expectations and the hopes of many of their colleagues throughout the academy.

Some of these people who are on the Harvard faculty are extremely gifted writers, but one of the things about their gifts as writers is they make it look easy, and it's not easy. Most of them put their books through draft after draft, as well as having a real natural talent for reaching across the divide between the academy and the non-academic. And you have only to read manuscripts by people who think that they are Steven Pinker to realize how good people like Steven Pinker are at doing what they do.

When you're contacting the editor at the presses-- so you've narrowed this down to a handful of presses. And by the way, nowadays there's not much concern, as there used to be, about multiple submissions. I would say that most editors and publishers will accept this.

The important thing, of course, is to let everybody know what the state of play is. It's not very pleasant for an editor to discover that she is one of six people that the author has sent something to, and that suddenly there is some much more complicated situation than she had previously realized. Authors are sometimes quite innocent about this. They're not attempting to play a game, but it looks bad.

So editors need to know about the book idea and its fit for them. And they also want to know about you, as an author. The initial inquiry is important, in both substance and style, as you can gather from that initial inquiry that I read to you earlier.

I don't want to work with that author. I will not work with that author. I sent that author's inquiries to another editor at the press, who in some respects is more suited, technically, to his subject. And the response came back with blinding speed from that other editor to give him the polite brush-off, because we saw in that inquiry all the danger signs of someone who was going to be impossible in every respect. And no matter how good his book was, it wasn't going to be worth it.

So write to the editors you're writing to, and envision them as real people. They probably are real people. Envision them as someone you would like to talk to, which you certainly will, if any of them becomes your editor.

It takes a long time to get a book published, and the editorial relationship is crucial. If anybody is going to be your guide, your explainer, your sponsor, your voice of reason, and your all around pal through this whole process, it's going to be your editor. And the editor had better be somebody that you like-- at least like enough for a couple of years.

Write the inquiry letter-- it can be email or snail mail-- to an editor by name. Spell the name right. Get the name of the press right. Proofread your letter carefully.

I cannot tell you how many times I get letters from people telling me how much they would love to have their books published by Yale University Press. And I don't mind. I don't know. I mean I answer, but I think it's funny. And you probably don't want that to happen.

Always when you're writing this letter, which should be fairly short, no more than a couple of pages, think about it from the editor's point of view. What are their needs? What do they need to know?

Respect their time. Don't telephone. Don't send the whole manuscript as an attachment, and expect them to print it out and read it that week. The tone should be confident, but not grandiose. Informative, but brief. Dignified, but unpretentious. Courteous, but approachable.

As Stephen King says in his very wise book on writing, you may need to write four drafts of this very natural sounding letter. As Stephen King says, you can't make them like your story, but you can at least make it easy for them to try to like it. Then respect the editor's professional judgment.

What you know about is your subject. What they know about is publishing. Don't say it's the only book of its kind, and there's nothing comparable in existence. That's probably not true.

Don't say it's interdisciplinary and that, therefore, it will be of interest to three or four different disciplines, religious studies, music, biochemistry. That's probably not true either. Don't make

ambitious claims about potential sales. Just because a lot of people are interested in a subject, say, Educational Testing, does not mean that they will all go out and buy a book about it. They will read a newspaper article, they'll read an op ed, and often that will give them all the information they want.

Then respect the editors' decisions. A lot of factors come into play other than the quality of your book. The fit, what's just been published, what they or other editors have in the pipeline. I got a note this morning from one of my colleagues-- this looks really interesting, but I have so many books on my list for the next two years, I can't deal with it. Would you like to have a look at it?

Well, I will. But that's just a practical matter. When that editor has to write a rejection letter to that author, it's not in any way personal. It's reasonable to ask for a timeline for a decision, but if the decision is negative, it's not personal.

Bear in mind, though, and this is my inspirational wind-up, that editors are always, always looking for something terrific. We are, by nature, optimistic, gregarious, enthusiastic, kind of sloppy sometimes, people. It's the manuscript editors who are the really beady-eyed, orderly people.

When you're envisioning the person you're writing to, envision a busy, benign, pragmatic person. Someone who doesn't know your subject in detail, but would like to, who is curious. Possibly this is even the kind of reader you would like to have.

This morning I read a review of the most important book I have on our spring list. One of the most important books of my career. And the review began, "This monumental book, more than 900 pages long, 30 years in the making, at once grand and intricate, breathtakingly inclusive, painstakingly particular, exhaustively explores the biological evolution of human behavior, and specifically the behavior of children. Melvin Konner, anthropologist and neuroscientist, weaves a compelling web of theories and studies across a remarkable array of disciplines. To read this book is to be in the company of a helpful and hopeful teacher who is eager to share what he found."

This is what editors live for. To work for years on a great book, and to see that the readers, especially those first and influential ones, really get it. Mel Konner, the polymath, has lived up to the standard set by someone very unlike him in all respects, Stephen King. So I'll close with his wise words.

"I don't believe a story or a novel should be allowed outside the door of your study until you feel confident that it's reasonably reader-friendly. You can't please all the readers all the time. You can't please even some of the readers all the time. But you really ought to try to please at least some of the readers some of the time." I think William Shakespeare said that.

[APPLAUSE]

GITA MANAKTALA: I'm still marveling at the turnout today. It looks like we have a real range of specialties represented. And it's not clear whether that's because of the difficulty of publishing books, or because of the very nice lunch on offer. Probably the latter. Rational choice theory tells us that even economists have to eat lunch.

It also tells us that I have less than altruistic reasons for being here today, because the chance to speak with Harvard faculty about books and publishing is not a chance that any editor would miss. It's very tempting to use my time here today to ask you about your research and your book manuscripts, but I've been asked to talk with you about publishing. So let me start by telling you a little bit about my press, the MIT Press. We are just across Cambridge, on the campus of MIT.

We publish 200 books a year, in about 15 major subject areas. They are listed in the handout that's in your packet. They range from the arts and architecture to the social sciences and the sciences. Within those areas, we publish monographs, trade books, textbooks, and works of reference.

We produce them in hardcover, in paperback, and in a growing list of electronic formats that we promote and sell around the world. Our editors are on the lookout for projects that are going to appeal to an international audience of readers. And they very much like to work with authors on their first books, because-- rational expectations, again-- they have reason to believe that these

authors will return to publish their second and third books with us, at least the most discerning and intelligent of them.

OK, MIT Press editors use different strategies to find and select the books that we end up publishing. Some of these are hunting strategies, and others are more like gathering. Strategy might actually be too grand a word for what are really sort of predatory or passive editorial behaviors.

Predatory behaviors are the use of food and wine to lure authors. They include campus visits, meetings at conferences, phone calls to say, oh, I read your article in the *Journal of Economic Literature* on neoclassical trade models and I think that would be a great book. I would say that our editors probably do more hunting in the sciences, just because book projects are less abundant there. The humanities are a very different story, as you know, and that's where we can do more gathering.

So a subset of the 200 books I mentioned is gathered from the thousands of queries that our editors receive every year. And the selection process really begins at this query level. If a project is a good fit for our program, if it promises to meet a real need in the world, the editor will usually ask to see a proposal, an outline, some sample chapters.

Now, if the editor likes this package, he or she will probably send it out to some peer reviewers. She will ask the reviewers to comment on the significance of the proposed book. The editor will also want to know what it's going to contribute to the existing literature on the topic.

Is it going to travel beyond its field? Is it going to be adopted for courses? And generally, what kind of uptake is it going to see in the marketplace? So yes, we're already talking about marketing at this very early stage.

Once the reviews come back, the editor is likely to share them with the author and ask for a response. Now, this is a really, really critical point in the process, because the author's response had better engage in a substantive and respectful way with the reviews. It always surprises me when authors don't realize this, and we get back a kind of dismissive response to the effect that, oh, well, these reviewers didn't understand what I was trying to do.

I think that's something the author has to take responsibility for. If the reviewers missed your point, you didn't make your point. So it's critical to engage in a serious way with the reviews, and authors really need to commit to addressing any major issues that the reviewers have identified at the proposal stage.

Once the author has responded, the project has to go through even more hoops. It's going to have to pass muster with an editorial board-- and note that this is comprised of MIT faculty-- and also with an internal review committee that's made up of our director, our CFO, various sales and marketing managers. Both of these groups are going to see the proposal, the reviews, and the author's response, and they're going to make a determination based on that package of the project's importance and its viability for the press.

Only after all of these hurdles are cleared is the editor likely to offer a contract for this project. So my objective today is to give you some advice on how to get to that stage. And I'm specifically going to tell you five things that your editor will want to hear from you in order to support the project.

Now, the other speakers here have commented, and we're all aware, that the economic situation facing authors and publishers today is a pretty difficult one. That really has nothing to do with the current recession. It's all about longer-term trends. The supply-and-demand picture is really not in our favor.

In the United States alone, something like 200,000 books are published every year. These books compete with one another, of course, but also with this huge corpus of previously published material that's increasingly available online. So it's no wonder that the attention of readers is very scarce, and it's distributed across this vast array of material and sources, some of them authoritative and others not. Google and Wikipedia, for all their virtues, have made us much too comfortable with good enough information.

Like it or not, I think that really does alter the game for non-fiction books, maybe especially for trade books. The pressure is on for these books to deliver their value readily, to be accessible, and to gratify even the most limited attention span. Now, I think that whether you're writing a

trade book or a monograph, it's important to be conscious of this, and to write in a way that respects the time and the attention of your readers. Elizabeth also said that.

Remember that publishers are more reluctant than ever to sign up 200,000-word manuscripts, just because it's harder than ever to envision readers for tomes like that, despite your wonderful book that was written--

ELIZABETH KNOLL: One book.

GITA MANAKTALA: Yes.

ELIZABETH KNOLL: The one long book I've written.

SPEAKER 1: [INAUDIBLE]

ELIZABETH KNOLL: 200--

SUSAN RABINER: 600.

GITA MANAKTALA: 600.

SUSAN RABINER: 600 pages. Tightly packed.

GITA MANAKTALA: Yeah. OK. I think it is worth taking a moment to talk about the reasons for writing a book in the first place. And to some extent, those reasons really depend on where you are in your career, and what you have to say. The first reason is always to communicate your ideas, and that's something you all already know how to do. You have a deep knowledge of your subject, and you have the ability to engage other people in that subject through writing and through teaching, and that's going to serve you very well in writing a book that can be published.

Some other really valid motivations for writing a book include the chance to shape understanding of a particular topic, the chance to inform a debate of some kind and some consequence, tenure or career advancement within your field, and broader public recognition beyond your field. Publishers share your interest in many of these things. We, too, want to publish books that communicate their ideas effectively, that will have an impact, and that will shape understanding

of important topics. Academic publishers are interested in work that either advances knowledge on a particular topic or usefully synthesizes it.

Along with my colleagues on this panel, I want to emphasize the importance of writing and shaping your book for a definable audience. By that I mean that, in general, you are not writing for a general reader. You're writing for a particular reader. So even though you strive to write clearly and organize your material effectively, your book is probably written for a core audience that has a specific interest in your subject.

Most of the books that my press publishes-- I would actually venture to say all of them, including trade books-- are written for particular readers with particular needs and interests. Now, we know that the most influential books travel far beyond their primary audience. But even those books are written for a primary audience. And understanding who makes up that core audience will really help you decide what material to include, what material to cover, what kind of language to use, and what structure and organization is going to serve your purpose with respect to those core readers.

Knowing the audience will also help you pitch your book at the right level for those readers. I see a lot of manuscripts that are inconsistent in their assumptions about the reader's knowledge of the subject being discussed. That is a major problem. It always gets noticed in the review process, and it simply has to be corrected before the book can be published.

But let's talk a little bit about this question of trade books versus monographs. What is the difference? On the publisher side, and from a sales and promotion perspective, the major difference is that trade books are destined for general bookstores, for Barnes & Noble, for your local independent. And because of that, they have to be written, and edited, and designed, and priced to compete in that very competitive and crowded retail environment.

Monographs do not have the same obligation to compete in that environment for the attention of readers. Libraries will buy them and shelve them, we hope. Individual readers will shop for them, online mostly. And the publisher will market them directly to individual readers at conferences and through the mail.

Both trade books and monographs do get publicity and advertising campaigns. At least at my press they do. But trade books get the bigger push to the mainstream media, where monographs are going to see most of their reviews in journals.

In deciding which type of book you're writing, I think there are some serious trade-offs to consider. For one thing, your objectives as a scholar can sometimes conflict with your ambitions as the author of a popular book. If you want to write a trade book, you'll have to find a topic that's broad enough and relevant enough to sustain the interest of readers who have no obligation to follow your argument over the course of 300 pages or more. But not too many more, because as we've said, trade books are not supposed to be too long. Ideally, no more than 400 pages. And you'll need to confine your notes and references to just a few of those pages.

You will probably also have to forego the tables and the charts and the equations that might otherwise present your data. And most of all, you'll have to make the material interesting and accessible to readers who don't already have a stake in it. The buyers at general bookstores I think are very literate people, they're well-read, and they know what their customers want. They have become ruthlessly selective about what they stock and display.

OK. I have an example to show you of what can happen when you don't make these kinds of trade-offs.

[LAUGHTER]

This is a wonderful book that everyone at my press loves. We published it a couple of years ago. We love the author, too. He's a young scholar. This is his first book.

It's a revisionist history of Columbus's famous voyage across the Atlantic in 1492. And it uses historical maps and other primary sources to reconstruct the whole cosmology, and the geographical beliefs of Columbus and his contemporaries. It makes a very compelling argument that Columbus ultimately sailed south, as well as west, and ended up in the Caribbean. We know he did that, but it explains why he did that.

What happened with this book is that--

[LAUGHTER]

Yeah, what happened? I want to show you.

[LAUGHTER]

It has these beautiful color maps that were a major source for the author in making his case. And when we saw these maps, we thought, gosh, we have to do these in color. It has to be a large format, because otherwise they won't be legible. And we end up doing the whole book in color.

And once we have committed to that and made that investment, everybody thinks, oh, this should be a trade book. I mean what a shame if it were not in bookstores. Well, it's not a trade book. It's not written as a trade book. It's a very long, dense, and scholarly history. It has more than 100 pages of notes, and 35 pages of bibliography, neither of which the author was in a position to drop. He was up for tenure, and he had to document his sources and show his scholarship.

Now, I think the press has to take the blame for trying to make this something that it wasn't.

SPEAKER 2: What's the price?

GITA MANAKTALA: The price is 42.95.

SUSAN RABINER: Oh, my god.

GITA MANAKTALA: I mean I think it started at--

SUSAN RABINER: You took a bath on that one.

[LAUGHTER]

GITA MANAKTALA: We did, we did. I think it started out at 39.95. We raised it a little bit.

SUSAN RABINER: I was going to say, 4,999--

GITA MANAKTALA: I know.

SUSAN RABINER: --is the right price.

GITA MANAKTALA: Yeah, I mean we did, we took a bath on it.

ELIZABETH KNOLL: Can I ask how much of a bath?

GITA MANAKTALA: You know, it has sold OK, but it hasn't sold through general bookstores at all.

ELIZABETH KNOLL: It looks cool.

GITA MANAKTALA: Yeah, it's a beautiful book.

ELIZABETH KNOLL: Yeah.

SPEAKER 3: So it should be more now.

[LAUGHTER]

GITA MANAKTALA: Yeah, you guys will buy it.

[LAUGHTER]

It's really not the author's fault that this didn't work as a trade book, and didn't sell thousands of copies through bookstores. It's the press' fault for trying to push it in that direction. And I have to say, the author did exactly what I would hope everybody would do in this situation.

He researched his subject well. He didn't dumb it down. He wrote a terrific book. And he deepened our understanding of a very important subject. By writing the book clearly and telling his story well, he made a contribution within his field, while leaving the door open to a wider audience. And that's exactly what, I think, academic authors should do. I think there are really good lessons here in this example.

So my advice is really to give your topic the serious and substantial treatment that it deserves. Write for a primary audience within your field, but do so in a way that's accessible to scholars in

other fields. And avoid aiming for the intersection of your field or your topic and some assumed popular audience, or wished-for popular audience, because doing that can really impose a lot of compromises, and the resulting book could end up missing both audiences. So that's the risk.

And with that, I'm going to give you the five things that I promised. These are some things that I like to hear from authors when they're proposing books. First of all, I want to hear who needs the book and why. Tell me about its primary audience, and if you're writing the book to be accessible to readers beyond that audience, please tell me who the secondary readers are and why they will be interested.

Next, show me its unique contribution. What is it going to add to the existing literature on this topic? What are the best books available, and how is this book going to complement or compete with them?

A third thing I want to hear about is the research or data you are presenting. Tell me how you came by this, and what stance you are taking with respect to that material. I want to hear about your argument and the evidence that gave rise to it.

A fourth thing I want to hear about is your qualifications. Now, each person in this room is qualified to write a book. But if you've been immersed in this topic for 10 years, and you've done field work in six countries, and you've compiled the largest database of extant research on the topic, I want to know that. Please tell me that.

And finally, tell me why the MIT Press is the ideal publisher for your book, or if not the ideal publisher, at least a good fit from your perspective. This is a good time to mention related MIT Press books, if there are any, so that I know your intended readers are people we're already reaching with our other books, which is an important consideration for us.

OK, so the five things again are about your book's audience, its unique contribution, its argument and evidence, your qualifications, and the project's fit for our program. Any author who can tell me what I want to hear about these things is likely to hear from me that I want to publish that book. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

KATE WITTENBERG: Well, I'm going to, in a very brief presentation, take on some of the issues that I think we're all hearing about in the area of electronic publishing. It seems that every day, we hear more and more about e-books, and digital publishing, and online scholarship. And I wanted to see if I could just use an example of a real world project-- it's the one that Bob Darnton mentioned, the Gutenberg-e project-- just to highlight some of the main themes, challenges, and opportunities I see in this area.

But first, I just want to make a distinction. We hear a lot about the dissemination of traditional books in digital form. And that would be the kinds of e-books we hear about that are being read on the Kindle, and now the iPad and other remote devices. And that's certainly e-publishing, and that's a very important distribution and marketing mechanism for all books, including scholarly books, going forward.

I'm not going to talk about that. I'm going to talk about something that has more to do with the creation of books that are born in a digital format, because in some way, that enhances the way that you're making your scholarly argument or that you're advancing the research in your field. And they're both really important topics, but I just want to focus more on the born-digital aspect, because I think that's closer to the general themes that we're talking about today in this group.

So I'm going to just quickly review the Gutenberg-e project. It's something that Bob Darnton, as he said, initiated when he was president of the American Historical Association. At the time, before I was at ITHAKA, I was running an electronic publishing center at Columbia University that was in partnership with the libraries and the information technology groups. And we partnered with Bob to get funding from the Mellon Foundation to launch this project in experimenting with born-digital scholarship, in this case, in history.

And the way it worked was the Mellon Foundation supported the project over six years. The AHA selected dissertations each year, which were awarded prizes. And what came along with the prize-- so the dissertations were reviewed by a committee, in terms of their quality of

scholarship, and what the authors got was a grant of \$20,000 to transform their print dissertation into an electronic work of scholarship, that was then published at Columbia University Press.

Now, the initial goals of this project-- and Bob mentioned them partly-- were first, to see if we could enable enhanced forms of historical scholarship and writing by using the digital medium. But also, to see if we could influence a change in attitudes toward digital publishing in the academy. And this gets back to all of the big issues that I know we all think about every day, having to do with tenure and promotion, and the ways in which digital is viewed by the academy, and whether it is viewed as being equal to-- in terms of tenure and promotion and professional advancement, equal to print publication.

And I'll talk a little bit more about our findings, but the purpose of the clear review that we undertook was deliberate. We wanted to make sure that these were reviewed, actually, even more rigorously than traditional print monographs, because they went through the AHA's review process and then they went through regular peer review by the university press. And then, the third initial goal was to see if using this medium could contain costs and increase the publishing activity, especially in fields that were highly specialized scholarly monographs, where they were having trouble getting published in traditional print format at university presses that were having problems publishing these books because of declining sales to libraries.

So what did we find? Now, this project took place over six years. We had an initial three-year grant, which was then renewed by the Mellon Foundation, because they wanted to see us continue the experiment over three additional years. So we have a span of time here that's interesting, because things changed over the course of the project.

One of the biggest findings was that there developed a very close, and complex, and rich relationship between the authors publishing these new forms of scholarship and the publishing staff with whom they collaborated in creating these new models. The authors became much more like collaborators in the publishing process, as they-- now, authors are always collaborators with their editors, as you've heard from my colleagues. It's a very close and very important relationship. In this case, though, the team expanded to include web developers, designers, programmers, and the people in marketing and publicity who had to figure out how we push out

information and knowledge about these new kinds of publications into the world. So we saw really interesting and very productive relationships develop between web developers and programmers, for example, with authors who felt that these IT professionals were actually helping them advance their scholarly argument by helping them figure out how to make an argument, how to add primary sources, how to use datasets in ways that they hadn't been able to do so in the past.

Second, over the course of the project, we saw an evolution of attitudes toward digital publishing. At the beginning, a number of the first couple groups of authors came back to us after the first year of their work on the books with some pretty hair-raising stories about the responses they were getting from their colleagues, and department chairs, in some cases, about this work. Attitudes were skeptical, and in some cases, actually quite negative.

One author, who I'll tell you about in a minute, who did an extraordinarily creative work about the Soweto uprisings in South Africa and interweaved three different narratives about the historical event, said that her chair had asked her at a meeting how her email project was coming. And she came back just really very dispirited, and said, are you sure I should be doing this?

Now, that really did change over the course of the project. All of the authors who came up for tenure-- now, it wasn't very many. It was only six authors a year over six years, so that's a small sampling. But all of the authors who came up for jobs or tenure got it. Now, that doesn't mean they got it because they published digital books with Gutenberg-e, but it does mean they weren't disqualified from these opportunities because of their works.

In some cases, they heard very positive reactions. This is one of the reasons they were hired for a position, because the school actually wanted someone with this sort of experience. In other cases, they said it was just looked at as another thing on a CV, a peer reviewed publication, and that was just fine. So it certainly changed over the course of the years that we were doing this, and I believe it's continuing to evolve perhaps more quickly now.

Third, our finding was that the time and the costs involved in producing these books exceeded our expectations, meaning we were over budget, but also allowed these specialized works to be published to what I consider very high editorial and production standards, and allowed the

authors to really push the envelope and look at new ways, as I said, of making their scholarly arguments. So we didn't find it saved money, but if we did find that it allowed a new model to be out there for using the digital environment in scholarly publishing.

Now, I thought it would be interesting to just share with you some of the big takeaways I had from working as a director of this project with Bob Darnton. I think we saw a cultural shift, as I said, in the publishing environment that was very interesting, and that was not something we expected. We found that authors were much more collaborators, rather than lone toilers.

As my colleagues have said, often editors work with authors from a very early phase of their projects, and actually help them shape their arguments. In this case, it was the same process, but as I said, it was really a team. And I actually thought about this afterwards, and compare it in some ways to what goes on more in the sciences, but that we don't usually see in the humanities, where we had a team of people with different expertise and backgrounds ranging from computer scientists to web developers, to editors, to authors, and to the people who were helping the authors at their home institutions, doing research with digital maps, or with usage of data, all working together over the course of the publishing process to create this final version of a work. And I think it was a very interesting experience for these historians, who don't usually work that way. In fact, usually work in very solitary ways until they reached the point of being ready to publish.

Second, the editors and the web developers took on a role that felt more like they were researchers at a research institute, creating new models along with the researchers and faculty, rather than receiving a finished manuscript and then being responsible for producing it. Now, there's a tremendous amount of creativity and knowledge that goes into producing a print manuscript into a book. But I'm saying that I think there was a feeling that this was a research project that had to involve all of the players in order to reach the goal that everyone wanted.

And then, finally, I think both the authors and my colleagues at the press started thinking in new ways about the presentation and dissemination of scholarship, and what the potential was for using this medium. Now, I want to say here that I think it's-- and this connects directly to what my two colleagues have already said, which is that it goes-- the same way that you need to think

about why you're writing any book, you need to think about why you would produce a born-digital-book. And there has to be an argument that you feel very strongly about, that will justify entering into this whole new model of scholarship and publishing.

In other words, doing it to have a gimmick, to just add links to things that are not central to your argument, that can be fun and interesting, but what we were looking at is really whether it can transform the scholarship itself. So the example I was referring to, this author who did a book on the Soweto uprisings, she wrote her dissertation trying to make an argument that there were really three narratives of history going on during those uprisings, one the narrative of the protesters. The other, the narrative of the police. And the third, the narrative of the government.

And she was trying to interweave these to show how history is made by bringing together different versions of an event. And she said to me at one point, I couldn't do this in my print dissertation, but all of a sudden, I could make this argument the way I had been thinking about it when I had the digital medium to work with. And what she did was she created her born-digital-book with different points of entry. So a reader could come in reading the student's perspective, the protester's, reading the government's, reading the police's, or reading the author. But you didn't read it necessarily in a linear way. You could come in and out, and interpret it, she argued, differently.

So that's just an example of a case where the digital environment let her do something she couldn't do otherwise, rather than just take a book and put it into the digital space. So some interesting questions that were raised through books like that, and through the whole project, that I think actually apply to everyone now that so much is being done in the digital terrain-- must a scholarly narrative be presented in linear form? Is that the most useful way to present your argument?

How does one present an authorial voice in something that can be read in an interactive way, or entered by a reader from different perspectives? Are images, archives, and data supplementary, or do they become the organizing structure of the book? And I was thinking about that example when you were speaking, because in some ways, in one of the other books, the maps actually became the organizing principle of the digital work, and then the narrative came in and out

around the maps. But the maps were making the argument, which was possible in this format, but wouldn't have been possible otherwise.

Does the digital format allow for new scholarly argument and interpretation that would not be possible otherwise? And then, can new forms of educational materials-- for example, textbooks-- be created by integrating electronic monographs and digital teaching tools? This is something that the authors came to me with, after the project was officially over, and said, you know, we're starting to teach with these, and we're starting to integrate lessons and teaching materials into the digital monographs, in ways that they were finding very useful. So all of these questions arose as part of this experiment.

Now, we had to address some very practical things. This wasn't all up there in theory. It was that we had young authors who needed to advance their careers and worry about very practical concerns. So we had to make some compromises in the course of this.

So first of all, we had to define, and then reinforce over and over again, that these were peer-reviewed materials. Because the perception has been, and still may be in some cases, that if it's online, it doesn't have the same peer-review standards. Second, we had to do some interesting things when we got to the point of getting these books reviewed, because we found that a number of the major history journals had a problem. Not that they were against reviewing them, but they just didn't know how to deal with a review letter from our publicity department that gave them a website. They just couldn't figure out how to put that into their review journal. And of course, it's critical, especially for first-time authors.

So I did something that I'm not exactly proud of, but we did it. So we produced these bound galleys, where we printed out the web version of the book and stuck them together, and then I wrote a whole disclaimer, a little essay that went at the beginning, saying, please do not read this without reading the web version, because you're going to miss all of these other things that are in the book. We had to do it, because that's when we started getting things reviewed in the journals. So it was important to be grounded in the real world of the culture we all work in while we were trying to do this experiment.

Robert Darnton and I together wrote letters to hiring and tenure committees explaining the peer-review process, and the quality of the scholarship in these books, just to help authors explain what it was that they were doing. And as I said, the authors' experiences with hiring and review changed over the course of the project. But we found even at the end, which is a couple years ago, there was still some uncertainty about digital publication.

So what's the future of born-digital-books and scholarly publishing? I think that the economic issues that we've heard mentioned several times today, as well as technology advances, and the fact that scholars are looking at new forms of scholarship in their work, are pushing born-digital-books and e-books forward, and the publishers are going to have to figure out how to respond to this. I think that, increasingly, monographs are being discovered and read in a digital environment, and that will begin to make people more comfortable in general with this whole genre of scholarship and publishing.

I think that there's a real opportunity that new discovery technologies, like Google and other search, and distribution, may actually increase audiences for scholarly books, because they'll be able to find things by searching chapters, subsets of chapters, just very specific keywords and concepts, and come up with scholarly work that they might not have been aware of otherwise. And that is an opportunity, I think.

And then authors, I think, are going to increasingly have more input into the form, the functionality, and the dissemination strategies of their books in this new environment. So it may mean that authors play a more active role in shaping their work, and then in helping their publishers get it out to the world. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

SUSAN RABINER: I'm going to try to pull it all together, because Elizabeth and Gita have given you really good basic advice about how to deal with editors, and Kate has given you a vision of the future. And I sort of span all three parts, because I was a university press editor for many years, then I was an editor and editorial director in commercial publishing. And now,

as an agent, occasionally I sell to a university press. As a matter of fact, I just closed a deal right here on my phone. But I primarily deal with the commercial publishers.

And I want to give you a sense of what's really going on. So it's not-- sometimes you need specific advice, but you also need the big picture. I wrote this book called *Thinking Like Your Editor*, and I wrote it close to a decade ago. And I wasn't surprised when it became the book that most of you started-- you're all using it, let me put it that way, because I hear from all of you.

What did surprise me is the number of young editors who had just joined commercial publishing houses, who would call me up and say, can I come over? And they really weren't looking for books for me. They wanted to talk to me about the book. And I said, why do you want to talk to me about the book? And they said, because we were all told to read it. We don't understand publishing, and everybody describes the book as the book that understands publishing.

And I wasn't surprised when I heard that, because when I went around trying to interview editors about the book, they all kept saying to me, don't ask me what I do. Just give me a manuscript and I'll do it, but I don't really know what I do. And they had read it.

And this leads to the point I want to make. Everybody's confused, is publishing alive, is it dead, where is it going? I'm an old dog. I've been in this business 40 years. Jason Epstein, who Bob Darnton talked about, was my first boss. So I go way back, because Jason's about 90 years old now.

[LAUGHTER]

At that time, you have to remember that even in the late 1960s, when I started-- I didn't start in the early '60s, that would make me a little too old-- publishing's roots were still in its-- publishing's existence was still as a craft industry. We didn't really know what we were doing. We didn't care what we were doing. We were just part of an exciting world, and we just did it.

And it really didn't matter, because even the biggest books, the biggest authors-- and Jason had huge authors-- got advances of 20,000 or 25,000. I remember when Phillip Roth got 100,000. It was just a startling event. So we sort of played around with the industry.

But a series of events occurred that forced publishing to become a business. The first was the rise of powerful agents, who started to get more and more money for their clients. The second thing was that mass market publishers, who were much more into money than the distinguished, old line, hardcover publishers, became the editorial directors and publishers of the old line, hardcover books, because they were more about money.

And the third thing is when we got bought out by people like Rupert Murdoch and other media companies, all these pressures started to force us to become a business. Bob talks about not knowing what a business report is. I remember the first time they asked me to predict sales on my books. I thought it was stunning that anybody would ask me to predict sales on my books, because I had no idea how many copies my books would sell.

But over time, we've become more and more of a business. And we've made business-type decisions. So whereas before, as one editor said to me this year-- and this is a very, very successful editor who's editorial director of a very successful house-- said, it used to be we read a proposal, we liked it, we figured, if we like it, somebody else will like it. No more. Now we say to ourselves, really, who is going to find this a must-read? Who is really going to go to the bookstore and plunk down money and buy it?

So in one sense, what you're seeing is a very severe business model imposed on a craft industry. We're very nervous about giving out-- it's affected the money that's being given out. It's affected the fact that editors now are doing a lot of editing. And if you turn in a manuscript in commercial publishing, remember, commercial contracts are terrible contracts. Just as university press contracts have that little clause in the end that says when the entire manuscript is finished, the board will read it, and if they don't like it, you're in trouble, you really don't have a contract.

Basically, the commercial publishing contract says, you write the book and if we don't like it, you return the money. So it's become much more of a business. And that's why editors are stiff and prickly, because they don't know how to be business-like themselves. Just as I left when I heard the story, because you hit it right on the money-- it wasn't the author's fault. The publisher fell in love with the project.

We are editors, we are sympathetic to writers, we want books, so we fall in love. And then we get to sales conference and we say, here's this fantastic book. And the sales reps with those great mine-eyes-glaze-over looks, are saying, Susan, we can't get 100 copies of this into all of Barnes & Nobles over the country. What are we going to do with it? And you suddenly said to yourself, why weren't the sales reps at the editorial meeting when we brought the project in? But that's not how publishing works. It's still-- one foot is in its craft beginnings, and one foot's in the business world.

Now, that was the first problem. So publishing is just learning how to be a business to this day, and this is true of commercial publishing as well. The second problem that came is the web. Web is a wonderful thing, but the web us by surprise. 20 years ago, there was jack shit on the web. 10 years ago, there was a lot of stuff. Today, you may say it's not the best, it's not the cleanest, it's not the most perfect-- it's damn good.

When I started as an editor at Oxford University Press, every manuscript I got, the first thing I did-- because I didn't have a PhD, and I was intimidated by every manuscript. So the first thing I did is, I had this pre-1960s version, because I didn't want my generation's mucking-up of history, so I got this pre-1960s-- I didn't want that perspective. I wanted the old view of World War I and World War II.

I had this old Columbia Encyclopedia, and I used to take-- I had it on my desk, and I had another copy at home. And before I started a manuscript, I just needed some overview to read. If I was doing a book about Madagascar, what did generally educated people know about Madagascar?

Well, the same thing happens today. When somebody comes to me with a project and they're writing their proposal, I say to them, I don't care what you're writing about. You what that editor's going to do, the first thing he's going to do? He's going to go to the web, and he's going to read Wikipedia.

You may knock Wikipedia. Wikipedia is very helpful to me. I love Wikipedia.

[LAUGHTER]

And they're going to read Wikipedia and four other articles. And if there's nothing in your proposal that goes beyond-- and you'd be surprised how much is on the web on little old Madagascar-- you're dead. So this took us by surprise.

The second thing is people no longer-- the whole reference industry in publishing collapsed, because if you suddenly see blue spots on your child, you don't run to the bookstore anymore. You click Google. That whole world of reference publishing had to morph into something very different.

If we do a medical book today, the medical book won't say "Your Prostate". It will say "Joe Schmo's Your Prostate", because Joe Schmo is the most famous doctor in the world, and anybody below Joe Impressive Doctor, who is not on Oprah, doesn't get a book today, because that stuff is on the web. So now we had competition from a new source of information.

People didn't have to buy a book to see the history of World War II. They got tremendous information. Then the archives started putting their stuff on the web. So now it wasn't even secondary material, it was primary material.

Then electronic books came along. We don't know how to price them. We're in the same situation as the movie industry is. We don't know when to turn them into the Netflix version versus leave them in the theaters.

The hardcover is where we make all our money. We don't want to cut into the hardcover, but simultaneously, there's a whole generation of kids, 20, 30, 35, who are not reading. They're certainly not going to buy hardcover. So we're caught in an electronic world.

Now, Kate made a terrific point. I just sold a book, I placed a book with Simon & Schuster. It's actually Free Press, which is a division of Simon & Schuster. And it was by two archeologists, and all their discoveries. And the whole thing hung on discovering some Google Maps, because these Google Maps showed tunnels that you couldn't possibly see.

I would have been ecstatic to have that be the first book from commercial publishing that never existed in hardcover. Because these maps looked lousy when you see them in paper, but when

you saw them on the screen and suddenly all these tunnels showed up on this exciting island, it was a whole new process. So I think my own belief is digital publishing is the future, and it will solve many, many problems.

But the other problem is, most of us in publishing are so-- we're not comfortable yet. We don't know how to do it. We don't know how to make it work. And it's not just digital publishing, it's digital marketing. The days where-- you guys were talking about author tours? Publishers in commercial publishing, there are no author tours. There is no advertising.

We are more likely to send out-- yes, we'll send out 30, 40 copies to the New York Times Review, and this and that. But we'll more likely spend the time and the money sending out 200 copies to the top 200 people who review our kind of book on Amazon.com. Every author now must have a web page. We want them twittering. We want them on LinkedIn.

We recently had a client who came to us-- I just want you to understand this new world, because it's tough for us, because we're not comfortable. I'm constantly calling my own kids to say-- for instance, I have just started to Twitter on publishing. I signed myself up as Boomer48, which tells you how old I am. Not that I'm 48. I was born in 48, which tells you really how old I am. I can't figure out how to convert that to Susan Rabiner, and I've tried and tried.

[LAUGHTER]

But it sounds-- right? It's embarrassing when you call your kid and you say, how do you do this? But the fact is, we had a client who came to us recently with a complete manuscript-- something you should never do-- but it was tremendous. It was just a totally original work, with zero platform, which I'll get to in a minute.

And we said, it's OK, it's a new world. You're going to create your platform. You know you're going to do? You're going to start a blog, you're going to start blogging, you're going to-- within six weeks he had gone viral. He now had a column.

We're not waiting for the review media, we're not waiting for the anointment, we're not waiting for the blurbs. So this whole electronic new world has hit the old, staid world of books, and we

yet haven't yet figured it out. Now, the third factor that hit on top of that is the recession, and that really hit hard.

We lost-- on the front list, people just weren't buying hardcover books. That we expected. What we didn't expect is-- generally, when a book hits the bestseller list, it hangs in there. Now we saw book after book after book hit the bestseller list, because we did a little publicity, and the minute the publicity stopped, the book was gone. So it didn't stay. It didn't have staying power.

Now, you can hit the bestseller list and be on there for three weeks and not cause 10,000 copies in sales. You'd be surprised at the numbers. And just to give you a sense of Amazon, I had an author, I remember, once who was on-- what was that wonderful TV show? Was it Brian Lamb? It was Book Notes. I think it's Brian Lamb.

And she was tremendous. And we watched this, and she went down to four on Amazon.com that day, you know what I mean? How many books do you think she sold? Five million? 500,000?

Try 500. That's what number four was on Amazon. The numbers are amazingly small.

We also had the problem that back lists got reduced. So what happened? When Rupert Murdoch saw that instead of making 10% profit, we made 6% profit, or we made no percent profit, he said, guys, your costs are too big. So people got fired.

I have never seen editors do as much editing as they're doing today, and I think one of the-- and really. You submit a manuscript today in commercial publishing, it's not unusual for you to wait five, six, seven months before that editor gets to it. And then that editor edits and edits and edits and edits.

One editor came to me with a book, and I just started flipping through it. I could just tell this book had really been edited, and I said, how many times did you edit this? He said, four complete edits. And that's not unusual.

Now, here's the fourth piece of the picture. Every publisher doesn't operate the way every other publisher does. Every agent doesn't operate the way every agent does. So if you go and you talk

to one agent, and you get a picture of publishing, that's a snapshot from one POV. You go to one publisher, it's a snapshot from one POV.

Right now, there's an interesting phenomenon going on. There's some publishers who only want big books. As if we knew what the books were. We don't. We misjudge all the time.

They're now-- they'll pay, as one editor said to me, you can't sell me a book for 80,000, but you can sell me a book for 800,000. Now, that 800,000 book may or may not sell. Nobody knows. But there's that group of publishers who now don't have enough books.

I'm getting letters every day from editors saying, as one editor put it, Susan, my pockets are cavernously open. Sell me a book. And another one who just said to me, Susan, I am desperate for a book. Do you have anything? I need it on the list.

Now, there's another school of people who say we're going to need books, the industry is going to survive. If it's a good, smart book, we're going to buy it, but we're going to buy it modestly. And the editor there tells me a different story.

She gets a submission from an agent, she likes it, it's not a giant book, but it's a good, very well-written book, and she says to the agent, what are you looking for? And the agent says, what I'm always looking for, 150,000. She says, then I won't bid, because I can only offer much less. She says, no, put in your bid. The editor puts it in for 15,000 and gets the book. So you have two schools operating.

So if you're looking for a clear definition of what's happening in commercial publishing today-- and what happens to us sort of drifts back affects you guys, too-- there is no clear definition. We're in change. But this is what I can tell you that is clear. I am doing the exact same type of book that I did 40 years ago, and the only people I represent are academics, and very well-educated, very smart journalists and public intellectuals.

As an editor, I published a dissertation by George Jhansi called *Gay New York* that did as well as most books ever do. As an agent, one of the first dissertations I took on was a biography of

Henry Ward Beecher. It won the Pulitzer, it was front page New York Times, it was front page LA Times.

So don't let anybody tell you that commercial publishing is not interested in you. We are extremely interested in you. I can't make this clear enough.

I can't get enough good history. I can't get enough good science. I can't get enough good politics. And we really get very good people.

What we're not-- here is where the problems arise. We want you, we want your expertise. I even do an old-fashioned type of book, and I dread every time I go out with it because it's hard to place, that is your standard, big, that type of book. I have a humongous, standard, big history of the Sino-Japanese War. I have humongous other things. I did a biography of Hirohito that makes that look slender.

[LAUGHTER]

And believe it or not, it won prizes. I even offered it to Kate when she was at Columbia.

[LAUGHTER]

Here's where the disconnect occurs. Commercial publishing, because of the web, can no longer be the primary disseminator of information. People don't come to us to learn in that same way. Argument, as these people have stressed, as Kate had stressed, is the name of the game in serious non-fiction. I refer to a book without an argument as a guided tour. There is no room for guided tours.

I shouldn't say that. Certain subjects are so new, we know nothing about them, that we'll take a guided tour from you. But generally speaking, not only do we need an argument, but-- I use the word wobble-- no wobble in your argument. Your argument is your thread through the book. It's going to get you from the beginning to your final thesis.

It walks a line. It directs the whole narrative. You've got to really know your argument. And the way-- strangely enough, I don't even do my proposals the way I describe in this book, because as I say, times have changed.

We devote the entire proposal to the argument, and we keep the proposal much shorter now, and then we take a second section, which is a table of contents, where we develop the second thing. Commercial books must be told as a story. Your proposal must be told as a story, preferably as a mystery.

It doesn't have to be a story the way fiction writers write story. They wrap story around character. You can write-- yours can be the story of an idea. It can be the story of an event. It can be the story of an argument.

All these books, why x matters, are really stories of arguments. There are books that are extremely successful, that are strictly the narrative is wrapped around the argument. It can be what's called character-driven story. Very tough to do, so you've got to go into it. But you must have a narrative, or you're not in the game in commercial publishing. You must have a clear argument, and you must have a narrative.

Now, the other thing that's-- what's changed is, look, I thought I was pretty good at the time I wrote this. I'm 10 times better now, and so are the editors, and so all the other agents. What's changed in the 40 years is, because of the recession, because of the competition from the web, and because we have to be a business, we're learning what works, and we're learning what doesn't work, and we're really enforcing the rules. And the editors are editing more, because they know how to edit.

You go into publishing, nobody teaches you how to edit. Nobody teaches you what is a good book. You database and figure it out yourself.

The editors are learning, and now, we're eliminating everyone who doesn't play by our rules. So the question for you guys-- we want you, but we don't necessarily want what you've been taught to do. The problem between you guys and me is nobody in between us.

And you really should think about, at your university and other universities-- because it's starting. I went down to Emory, where they have a program. They have somebody who's an intermediary, who the academics go to-- not the kids-- who the young junior faculty go to and work with to present proposals and things like that, who bridge the gap. How do you take what you know and turn it into a book?

Now, if we take you on, my agency, we're going to work three to six-- the average book that comes to us, we spend three to six months with the author figuring out how to do that translation. How to take what you know, turn it into a narrative, and isolate your argument, because we are confident that we know what argument will resonate with a general interest reader. But you can do it yourself. You've got to start setting up groups together.

In New York City, all the writers have writer groups. And it wouldn't be a bad thing to start off at universities also, where you critique each other not for its intellectual content, but is this really-- I remember you saying, who's the audience? Authors, they kid themselves as to who's the audience. They're writing about that the military, and they say everybody who's been military is going to read it. It's a policy book. Not one person who's been in the military is going to read it.

So you have to start-- we need people in between the two of us, so we can start meeting up with each other, and explaining what we need. And we need an opportunity to talk to each other. For instance, now, I'll give you one piece of advice.

Remember I said I do these big, major histories? I only do them when the author owns the topic, and I mean really owns the topic, and also when they're either the first one or there hasn't been one in a gazillion years. Nobody, believe it or not, has ever written a history of the Sino-Japanese War, and this guy owns the topic, and actually writes brilliantly. So the marriage is there.

But generally speaking, let me give you some advice, as they gave you some advice, about trade publishing. Short books are in, as one editor said to me and she has a track record of enormous success. As a matter of fact, I did a book with her this year called *Fordlandia*, which was the finalist for the Pulitzer, for the Book Critics Circle Award, and for the National Book Award.

Those are the three big kahunas in publishing. And she deserves all the credit, because she's a brilliant editor. But as she said to me, if I say to an author, why does this book have to be long, and he says, because I have a lot to say-- that's not good enough, is what she said to me.

What you want to think about are creative ways to get at your topic. So for instance, instead of doing the whole Sino-Japanese War, what you want to look for-- this is the new trend, is you find one moment that is an iconic story, as Iris Chang did in *The Rape of Nanking*. She told the story of the Sino-Japanese War by telling that one moment.

Whatever you're working on, there's one moment in time, there's one event that has its own beginning, middle, and end narrative. Fordlandia actually came out of a bigger book that the author had written on American hubris in Latin America, and the editor said, you know, tell that story, because more people will read it. So you want to look for the one iconic event that you can tell as a story, but embed in it the larger implications, because that's how people read today.

There's a book on the bestseller list now called *The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks*. It's about HeLa cells. If any of you are in biology, you know what it is immediately. And if you're not, you have no idea. I did a book with Bob Gavel years ago, so I happen to know what it is.

Most cancer cells reproduce four, five, six, seven, 10 times at most. This woman, a 30-year-old black woman, had cancer cells that just kept growing and growing. And the technical term for that is immortalized. They became the cells that research places all over the world, since the 1920s have been using. They are the cells that resulted in cures and everything else.

And this journalist very smartly saw here's a story of a black woman who died because she was put in the poor ward at Johns Hopkins, her family to this day doesn't have many medical health care, doesn't have insurance, because they're still struggling, and yet her cells have generated rewards, financial and medical, beyond belief.

So she tells the story of Henrietta Lacks and this woman's life and her cells to get at the issue of health care. What you have to do is find created ways to get at your topic, and you have to find how to do it as a narrative. And then you use your smarts, your education, your credentials, your everything.

We love nothing better than to say, it's from Harvard, it's from Yale. We refer to that as the Mafia. This is the person who owns the topic.

[LAUGHTER]

You know? It is, it's very good. This is the person who owns the topic. This is a person who will have no difficulty getting blurbs for us. This is a person who can compete with anyone in debate on the topic. But they've also figured out a creative way to tell the story.

Talk to your neurologists. We are wired for story. We're not wired for information. We remember things in story.

When I was an editor, and Kate will confirm this, you go to sales conferences-- you guys, I know, too. But when I started, my first sales conference at Oxford University Press, every book was half an hour. Now you're lucky if you get half a minute. And there were hundreds and hundreds of books being presented. How do you get the reps to remember your book? You tell a joke or you tell a story.

It's the same with books. You must have a narrative, and you must learn how to write narrative. And narrative is not what people are teaching for fiction. Non-fiction narrative is its own skill. And it's something-- I can't urge it enough. You guys all through academia will increase your chances dramatically of taking your rightful place in publishing more and more books if, somehow or other, within the university setting, you set up non-fiction narrative programs and writerly groups where you critique each other, and where you possibly bring in-- there are lots of editors who've lost their jobs. They might be good--

[LAUGHTER]

Instead of having writers on campus, have editors on campus. That's basically what's happening. And you guys all have to go.

[APPLAUSE]