

Content: Exploring the theory and practice(s) of literary media in a changing publishing marketplace

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I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that any material that has previously been submitted and approved for the award of a degree by this or any other University has been acknowledged.

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Abstract

This integrative chapter introduces and contextualises my PhD by Publication, which incorporates a portfolio of work created and curated over a twenty-year period. During this timeframe, publishing, communications and the literary industries have significantly changed, largely as a result of digitalisation and particularly in terms of how content is produced and consumed.

While the five publications here, which include a book, three chapters and a journal article, offer analysis of the impact of digital technologies on audiences, the case studies demonstrate a commitment to the integration of theory into creative and autotheoretical practice, in the form of installations (digital and analogue) and creative narrative collaborations. These dual perspectives form a distinctive approach to ‘Exploring the theory and practice(s) of literary media in a changing publishing marketplace.’

My research therefore illustrates how publishing models and writing platforms have responded to the digital marketplace. It represents an original contribution to knowledge that draws together innovative methodological approaches, with particular emphasis on the interplay between practice-based research and literary media. In doing so, it points to a new direction in scholarship, including the role of literary media studies, both in the academy and in relation to the literary as a cultural industry.

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Portfolio contents

1. Kiernan, A. 2021. *Writing Cultures and Literary Media: Publishing and Reception in the Digital Age* (Palgrave).

Book contents:

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Writing culture and cultural value

Chapter 3: Critics and curators in a socially networked age

Chapter 4: Diversity, representation and innovation in online literary promotions

Chapter 5: Instagram, poetry and the cult of the amateur

Chapter 6: From fidelity publishing to playable stories

Chapter 7: Marketing true lies and autofiction

Chapter 8: Materiality and post-digital storytelling

Appendices (including extracts from survey)

2. Kiernan, A, 2023. 'Small press publishing in a post-digital world: Creative campaigns and promotional opportunities.' Thomas, Bronwen, Round, Julia and Ensslin, Astrid (editors). In *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media*.
3. Kiernan, A. 2011. 'The growth of reading groups as a feminine leisure pursuit: Cultural democracy or dumbing down?', in *From Salons to Cyberspace: Readings of Reading Communities*, Denel Rehberg Sedo (editor), Palgrave.
4. Kiernan, A. 2018. 'Futurebook Critics and Cultural Curators in a Socially Networked Age' in *The Digital Critic: Literary Culture Online*, Robert Barry, Houman Barekat & David Winter (editors), New York: OR Books.

5. Kiernan, A. 2016. 'Mad Girl's Love Song: Reflections on routes into reading, writing and mentoring'. Journal: Book 2.0, 6 (1 & 2), Intellect Books.

Impact: Case studies 1-3 (practice-based research)

1. The Literary Platform – a digital publishing agency and creative incubator:

<https://theliteraryplatform.com/about-us/>

2. Cultural Capital Exchange: Creating new Fictions through Immersive Storytelling

3. Pick me up / MAI Feminist Journal – interdisciplinary creative practice

Introduction

This integrative chapter introduces my PhD by Publication and offers a roadmap for navigating the ways in which my research, evidenced in the accompanying portfolio, has contributed to knowledge in the developing fields of publishing studies and literary media. In discussing the relationship between literary media and reflexive practice-based research, this integrative chapter connects the elements contained in this submission. My research has investigated how writing cultures have changed and has explored some of the challenges and opportunities these changes represent for the emergent field of literary media, particularly in terms of the artistic and commercial opportunities afforded by both codex and content within a changing publishing marketplace. As a doctoral researcher based in the Department of English and Creative Writing, and as an academic based in the Department of Communications, Drama and Film, my research focuses on ways to write, create and represent engaging stories across artforms and disciplines.

A note on structure

This chapter links the three research themes (A-C) with the numbered list of publications and case study portfolio submissions in the contents page, for ease of reference. The chronology of my professional experience runs parallel to some of the digital and cultural shifts that have taken place within publishing and the literary industries during the last two decades. The structure is primarily thematic rather than chronological, and the perspectives presented in the case studies have an iterative quality that derives from recurring themes being explored through different forms and formats (for instance VR, poetry and exhibitions). Some of the later submissions mark a shift from text-based to multimedia collaborations, which demonstrate a commitment to practice-based research. In the three case studies, for instance, audiences were invited to engage both as ‘readers’ and ‘viewers’. Therefore, while some of my earlier publications discuss the impact of media on writing (and literary) culture (Kiernan 2011; see also Kiernan 2006), later case study submissions in the accompanying portfolio

offer mixed media collaborations *as* writing (and literary/visual) culture (see case studies 1-3). This confluence of theory and practice signifies a shift in approach towards practice-based research, which I will discuss in the section relating to research theme B: ‘Double Game: How have changing approaches to scholarship and practice-based research informed the expanded field of literary media?’

My work has made an original contribution to knowledge in the following ways:

1. Research theme A: By creating work that addresses the perceived lack of scholarship in the field of literary media that has been robustly problematised in work such as Simone Murray’s book *The Digital Literary Sphere: Reading, Writing, and Selling Books in the Internet Era* (John Hopkins 2018), my research has contemporary relevance for digital humanities scholars (see publications 1-5). *Writing Cultures and Literary Media: Publishing and Reception in a Digital Age* (Kiernan 2021) has been downloaded 4128 times (as at 1 September 2023), and this data is evidence of the contemporary relevance of my work for students and scholars of publishing studies and literary media. My research captures contemporary perspectives about the impact of digital media on writing culture, for example in the form of my survey titled ‘How has writing culture changed in this digital age?’ (Kiernan 2021). The survey was completed by 26 internationally significant authors, poets, journalists and publishers (such as Xan Brooks, Brian Cathcart, Jack Underwood and Kit de Waal), which constituted 10,000 words of feedback. Each writer shared qualitative, often impassioned responses, to themes such as disintermediation, remediation, digital distractions and reviewing/literary criticism. Undertaken at the start of 2019, the survey responses, and my critical analysis thereof (Kiernan 2021: 103-113), go some way to addressing the kind of concern expressed by scholars such as Simone Murray and Bronwen Thomas, who work within the digital literary academic sphere. Murray states for instance that: ‘Scholarly dialogue that might have been expected to take place between and among book history/print culture studies, media studies, and digital

literary studies has to date largely failed to occur' (Murray 2018: 8). Like Murray, my research critiques a perceived conservatism of methodology in the field(s).

2. Research theme B: In producing innovative work that explores the relationship between digital and analogue literary culture, my practice-based research also contributes to the field of literary media and literary studies (see especially case studies 1-3). The mixed-media methodological approaches represented in this submission draw on – and contribute to – the work of author-artists and publishers who experiment with content, particularly through visual media. My creative case studies articulate what I suggest is a symbiotic relationship between literary texts and visual communication (as evidenced in case studies 1-3 and publications 1 and 2). Again, my work demonstrates the application of theory to practice through contemporary case studies that I suggest builds on Murray's work on the future of the digital humanities, in ways that embrace cognate disciplines such as philosophy, visual cultures and cultural sociology (Murray 2018: 7). Such interdisciplinary approaches resonate with the work of artists and authors such as Sophie Calle, Patricia Lockwood (see publications 1 and 2 and case study 2) and Daisy Hildyard, whose authorial practice includes fieldwork investigations and call-and-response thematic collaborations with artists (Calle 2013; Lockwood 2019 and 2021; Hildyard 2017 and 2022).
3. Theme C: My research explores the potential for using literary criticism and sociological frameworks for analysing literary texts within their broader social and cultural contexts (Kiernan 2021: 15-16). In considering how literature reflects and influences society, they help elucidate the relationships between cultural production, consumption, and social dynamics. Interpretative communities and reader response studies focus on understanding how readers engage with and interpret literary texts. Drawing on these combined methods, my research explores the diverse ways in which readers make meaning from texts, taking into account their individual backgrounds, experiences, and social contexts. By studying reader responses and examining

interpretative communities, my research has produced insights into some of the varied ways in which cultural participation unfolds (Kiernan 2011; Kiernan 2021: 22-25; see also Radway 1995).

Bourdieu posits that individuals acquire cultural capital through socialization processes, such as education, upbringing, and exposure to different forms of art, literature, and music, in other words, cultural participation (Bourdieu 1996: 2; Kiernan 2021: 10-11). Such encounters often form the basis for establishing social hierarchies and distinctions that centre around the concept of cultural capital, and the role it plays in the reproduction of social inequality (Bourdieu 1996; Kiernan 21). My particular research interest is concerned with how this understanding of social inequality might be redressed through narrative experiences. (See publications 1-3 and case studies 1 and 2, and my conference paper at Beyond the Book 2015, ‘Crowdsourcing and the social benefits of community publishing’).

My experience and perspective

When I began working at André Deutsch Publishing in 1996, the business was in a state of flux, having just been taken over by VCI, a multimedia company. André Deutsch, which was renowned for its literary fiction, had a prestigious stable of authors that included Gore Vidal, John Updike, Jean Rhys and Jack Kerouac. After the demise of the Net Book Agreement in 1995, Deutsch, like many independent literary publishers, was forced (in the sense that its sales were down but longstanding members of staff were resistant) to adapt to a new media marketplace (Athill 2011; Squires 2007) and was taken over by VCI, a media company. The tensions emerging from opposing leadership styles and mandates during André Deutsch's reign, which Diana Athill wrote about in her memoir *Stet: An Editor's Life* (2011), remained problematic during the 1990s. Working for the two company heads was challenging: Tom Rosenthal's approach to publishing was markedly different to that of Tim Forrester, who had a background in retail. This biographical detail is relevant in that it contextualises the theoretical debate within my personal professional experience.

As J Collins asserts in *Bring on the Books for everybody: How Literary Culture Became Popular Culture*: 'the increase in scale secured by conglomeration allows for an unprecedented interdependence of the publishing, film, and television industries, which can reach that 'public at large' wherever it may be...' (Collins 2010: 33). It was during this period of multimedia growth, in which commissioning practices shifted from literary fiction to popular culture, that the newer recruits at André Deutsch (including myself) began to develop a pragmatic understanding of the changing publishing landscape, and specifically that, '...complicated mix of technology and taste, of culture and commerce...' which resulted from digital convergence culture shaping the outputs of conglomerate publishing houses (Collins 2010: 7). Collins' work in this area was important for the emerging field of literary media, in that it acknowledged the 'synergy' between 'culture and commerce' and 'technology and taste' in an optimistic way, which deviated from the tendency to represent mutually exclusive positions in relation to the perceived tension between digital and print that

has been a characteristic of the prevalent discourse (Bourdieu 2010). By working in publishing at a time of structural change, in various positions (editorial and promotional), I developed a particular interest in the role that popular cultural narratives and media ‘tie-ins’ could perform, in terms of the business models of independent literary publishers. Balancing high culture and popular cultural outputs (in other words the type or genres of publications and the lists they were assigned to) was a process that I subsequently learnt had particular significance within a Bourdieusian understanding of cultural capital. (This is more fully explored in research themes A and C, and in publications 1-4.)

In a subsequent job, as deputy editor of an arts magazine (*Pluk: Photography London, the UK and Europe*), I cultivated a richer understanding and appreciation of the commercial and aesthetic determinants inherent in the creative and literary industries. Navigating relationships between words and images, and economic and social capital, have subsequently become recurring preoccupations in my work. This is also evident in recent positions, for instance as Creative and Editorial Director at Stranger Collective (a creative content studio), as a contributing editor for *MAI: Feminism and Visual Culture* (a peer-reviewed journal), and through the work we create, produce and publish at The Literary Platform (see case studies 1 and 3).

Alongside my ongoing professional practice, I have worked in academia for 20 years, in the fields of publishing, journalism, communications, creative writing and the creative industries. I co-founded and directed the MA Publishing at Kingston University, was Head of the Department of Writing at Falmouth University, and was programme director of the MA Creativity at the University of Exeter. I have also contributed to postgraduate publishing programmes at the University of Exeter, Oxford Brookes University and Plymouth University.

This combined professional pathway intersects to form the foundation of my practice-based research. Literary media and practice-based research therefore offer the ‘best fit’ for the work that I have done, and, through this integrative chapter and the portfolio of publications and practice shared here, I show how these creative elements respond to specific

research questions – and also to one another – thereby offering an explanatory framework for the original contribution to knowledge my work has made.

Cultural context

The profound structural changes in publishing and the literary industries, in terms of processes and outputs, after conglomerate takeovers in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in a systemic shift towards more multimedia, convergent enterprises (Kiernan 2021; See also Athill 2000; Jenkins 2008; Murray 2018; Squires 2007). In research theme A of this chapter, and in publications 1-5, I interrogate ways in which, since the 1990s, the tension between economic and social capital has been affected by developments in the field of digital media production and digital communications. Within publishing, the field of ‘large scale cultural production’ is understood as generating profit through the creation of low-risk, low-cost, large-scale outputs intended for established audiences (for instance, readers who will buy all titles in a series by a particular author). This tension – between obsolescent and limited edition or collectible publishing outputs – is discussed in relation to book publishing and bookselling in depth in publications 1 and 2 (Bourdieu 1993: 97; Kiernan 2021).¹

The expanded field signifies mass produced and/or popular culture while the latter often denotes ‘highbrow’, intellectual or literary arts culture. This understanding has underpinned what can be retrospectively viewed as an attitude of scepticism by literary studies scholars predicated on a previously pervasive view that the threat of digital for print – the ‘death of the book’ – meant that digital innovations should be treated with suspicion or even ignored within literary studies discourse (Collins 2010; Murray 2018). However, as I assert in publication 2, ‘the field of restricted production’ – understood here as literary and limited edition print publications – has changed as audiences have adapted: Post-digital

¹ Historically, (as I demonstrate in publications 1-4,) this field has largely consisted of mass market fiction; more recently, as I suggest in publication 2, ‘Independent Publishing in a Post-Digital World: Creative Campaigns and Promotional Opportunities’ (Kiernan 2023) the field has broadened to include digital content and copy. Conversely, books with ‘social capital’, in the field of ‘restricted production’, are more likely to be created in short runs by and for creative producers and/or intermediaries and displayed as signifiers of cultural capital (Kiernan 2023: 300).

content consumers often engage with both creative digital marketing campaigns on social media and texts with high production values, which is evident in the curation and display of individual collections of, for instance, Penguin Classics or Persephone Books on Instagram, as a means of showcasing cultural capital (Kiernan 2023: 300).²

Simone Murray suggests in broad terms that constructed dichotomies between highbrow and popular culture, literary text and film adaptation and indeed digital and print publications are: ‘passé, almost embarrassingly naïve... in the eyes of mainstream literary studies...’ (Murray 2018: 2; Murray 2008). However, such constructed tensions are significant in that they also represent a broader psychological discomfort, particularly among ‘conscious’ consumers, with the threat of pervasive digital culture. This perspective resonates with the philosophical and sociological misgivings that Sherry Turkle and Shoshana Zuboff express in their respective books, *Alone Together: Why We Expect More from Technology and Less from Each Other* (Basic Books 2017) and *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power* (Profile 2019), both of which have particular relevance for convergence culture and literary media. As I explain in chapter 1 of *Writing Cultures and Literary Media* (publication 1):

Zuboff persuasively suggests that the commodification of communication in the digital world presents a significant threat to democracy, an unprecedented counterpoint to the view that expanding our networks is integral to successful business communication and growth. Our consumer choices, and what we publish on social media (because we are all publishers now), are harvested and reconfigured as data that informs what stories and “stuff” is sold back to us online. (Kiernan 2021: 2).

The focus of attention, in terms of the cultural and critical discourse here, has turned away from how we read to the implications of the narrative of technological determinism, which distracts from disquieting ideological concerns regarding how we (digital audiences

² Platforms such as Pinterest, Instagram and Facebook offer spaces upon which to forge an aesthetically determined identity made up of colour coded photos and sketches which showcase ‘moments’, memories or influences as a way of communicating narratives of commodified emotion and style. Books such as *My Ideal Bookshelf* (Little, Brown 2012) emulate the encoded repetition that characterises the behaviour of hashtagging social media users. With #bookshelfie’s from postmodern novelists including Jennifer Egan and Miranda July, the illustrated book reveals signifiers of style amplified in social settings (La Force 2012; Kiernan 2023).

and readers) are being read, as a result of advances in AI and algorithmic audience monitoring and personalised advertising.

Taking on board these concerns, I argue that innovation in the context of publishing and literary media should not be restricted to a discourse of technological determinism: digital technology has been harnessed as a means of enabling the development of fresh formats for the production and reception of literary texts, in tandem with the revival of analogue cultural production, particularly over the last decade, in which an experientially-orientated form of counter-consumerism has marked a shift in the buying behaviours of generation Z (Currie 2022). This view aligns with the suggestion that: ‘Put briefly, what is currently missing and is urgently needed is a digital literary studies that is both contemporary and contextual’ (Murray 2018: 9). This research is intended, in part, to address that perceived omission. While acknowledging Murray’s central role in interrogating these emerging fields within the digital literary humanities space, this PhD is therefore also committed to analytically reflecting on post-growth alternatives to technological determinism; a commitment that is most evident in submissions 1 and 2 in relation to research theme A.

Writing Cultures and Literary Media

The principal component of my portfolio is the monograph: *Writing Cultures and Literary Media: Publishing and Reception in a Digital Age* (Kiernan 2021, see publication 1). The book draws together recurring threads, tensions and frameworks, to make the case for hybrid content (digital and analogue) to coexist in ways that enhance the potential for the field to evolve and reach new audiences (Kiernan 2021: 89-102). *Writing Cultures and Literary Media* analyses and responds to insights gleaned from the analysis of contemporary writing and publishing contexts that demonstrably engage with and/or resist challenges presented by digital communication, such as distractedness, instantaneous communication and disintermediation (Kiernan 2021: 19-30; 45-57). It explores the intricate relationship between the production and consumption of literary media, with a particular focus on the impact of digital innovation on the circulation of cultural capital hierarchies (Kiernan 2021: 9-57). In

the context of this investigation, cultural capital refers to the symbolic and intellectual resources that contribute to an individual's social status and cultural authority (Bourdieu 2010).

I argue in the book that the advent of digital technologies and the proliferation of digital literary culture have significantly transformed the landscape of literary production and consumption. Traditional gatekeepers, such as publishers and literary critics, no longer hold a monopoly on the creation and dissemination of literary works (Kiernan 2018; Kiernan 2021: 19-30). Digital platforms, self-publishing tools, social media, and online communities have, to some extent, democratized the production and distribution of literary media, enabling a broader range of voices and narratives to enter the cultural sphere (Kiernan 2018; Kiernan 2021: 31-43).

This democratization of literary production has disrupted established hierarchies of cultural capital. Previously, access to publishing networks and institutional support played a crucial role in determining which voices and narratives gained recognition and validation. However, digital platforms (including The Literary Platform, see case study 1) have provided alternative avenues for marginalized or underrepresented authors to share their work directly with audiences, bypassing traditional gatekeepers (Kiernan 2021: 19-43). The positive impacts of this shift are evident in the diversification of an expanded literary canon and a shift in attitudes among publishing professionals aware of the need to publish narratives that challenge the dominance of limited cultural traditions and perspectives (Saha and van Lente 2020; Kiernan 2021: 31-43).

At the same time, the digital environment has also presented new challenges for authors seeking to gain visibility and recognition. The abundance of digital content and the ease of self-publishing can result in information overload and reduced attention spans among both producers (writers) and consumers (readers) (Kiernan 2021: 103-113). In this saturated landscape, it becomes increasingly challenging for individual authors to capture and maintain the attention of audiences. Consequently, new forms of digital literacy, marketing strategies,

and community-building efforts are essential for authors to navigate the digital realm successfully (Kiernan 2023).

Moreover, the digitization of literary media has altered the dynamics of literary consumption. Readers now have access to a vast array of texts, often for free or at significantly reduced prices, through e-books, digital libraries, and online platforms. This abundance of options has led to changes in reading habits, as well as new modes of engagement and interaction with literary works. Readers can participate in online communities, share their opinions through reviews and social media, and engage in conversations with authors and other readers, thus shaping the meaning and reception of literary texts (Kiernan 2011; Kiernan 2018; Kiernan 2021; Kiernan 2023). Understanding these dynamics is essential for scholars and practitioners interested in the evolving landscape of literary culture and its relationship to digital innovation.

Methodology

My book, *Writing Cultures and Literary Media* (Kiernan 2021), was influenced by James Clifford and George Marcus's anthology *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (1986, reissued in 2010) (as is evident in the title). The ways in which Clifford and Marcus reframed the debate around the influence of literary methodologies for ethnography, in terms of, 'ethnographers employing literary approaches to their science' (Clifford 2010: 3), blurred the boundaries distinguishing art from science. This approach emboldened my exploratory engagement with interdisciplinary discourses in the fields of literary media and publishing studies in relation to traditional literary studies (see chapter 3, publication 1, for a discussion of the New Criticism).

Writing culture

Ethnographic research engages in the lives and stories of those being studied, which is particularly relevant in the context of *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 2010). In *Literature Live: The Experience and Cultural Value of Literary Performance Events from Salons to Festivals*, Ellen Wiles discusses the publication of Clifford and Marcus's *Writing Culture* as a significant moment in the development of the field of ethnography (Wiles 2021, 236). Traditional ethnographers, whose approach to their discipline was fact-based and scientific, were wary of the new breed of ethnographers who were keen to experiment with creative, interpretive approaches. Contributors to *Writing Culture* used writing and analysis as tools for better understanding culture and communities, and such humanities-informed methods were viewed by some as being questionable.

In sketching aspects of literary life, incidentally during the early years in publishing and by design since starting this project, I have been able to gather interviews, observations, reader's reports and artistic assessments of writing events as a participant observer, thereby drawing on ethnographic approaches for the purpose of better representing narrative discourses that don't necessarily fit neatly into singular disciplinary categories.

Literary sociology

Pierre Bourdieu's methodological approach in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* has materially shaped my thinking (Bourdieu 2010). It has been similarly influential for interdisciplinary literary sociologists such as Silva, Warde and Wright, who capture the essence of this progressive approach in their suggestion that '...any study aiming to both pronounce on patterns of cultural participation and to theoretically engage with the nuances of cultural orientations, i.e. to engage with Bourdieu on his own terms as an imaginative empirical sociologist, requires multiple methods' (Silva et al 2011: 301).

Bourdieu maps social space in terms of the social positions occupied by individuals and groups within it, with the notion of the Field offering a way of illustrating relevant relations: 'A field may be defined as a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions...We can...compare a field to a game...it follows rules...that are not explicit and codified' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992: 97-8). The Field has proved helpful for literary scholars seeking to articulate cultural value in relation to given texts (and contexts) and has given rise to what Silva, Warde and Wright suggest is a 'further sub-field of cultural research' in which 'ethnographic forms of inquiry into cultural participation...reveal the meaningfulness and complexity of engagement with popular, commercial and media cultures...' (Silva et al 2009: 301). They go on to suggest that: 'Such studies imply important alternative relations between cultural taste and power... and...Such developments reveal the methodological and theoretical issues that the relationship between cultural capital and taste raises' (Silva et al 2009: 301). By unpicking the assumed dichotomy between methodological and theoretical issues, Silva et al offer a helpful reference point for mapping out the interlinked elements that characterise my methodological approach. Drawing on these mixed media methods, enables the development of a paradigm that both acknowledges the conditions of literary production and its relationship to critical reception. (See publications 1-3).

These examples ground the authors within the communities that they are reporting on in ways that resonate with Robert Darnton's sociological portrait of literary life in eighteenth century Paris (Darnton 1971), an era for which Habermas' concept of the public sphere and the relationship between coffee house culture and the growth of communications has particular relevance (Habermas1992). Bourdieu's field, Darnton's communication circuit and Habermas' public sphere represent a recurring triangulation of ideas that have influenced my methodological approach, which is broadly informed by dynamic encounters between empirical social theory and representation and identity.

Research theme A: Literary Media: In what ways has literary culture adapted to digital-first communications?

‘Literary media’ can be understood as referring to the relationship between literature, digital media and media studies. As my publications and case studies demonstrate, I am particularly interested in the ways in which literary narratives can be creatively expressed through non-literary platforms, formats and disciplines. Literary media can also be understood as signifying a shifting convergent perspective, for instance through the content that we create and publish at The Literary Platform (see case study 1).

As an emergent field, literary media embraces the relationship between digital literary humanities and other forms of narrative production. The editors of *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media* point out that ‘The term literary media is new’, as are understandings of ‘what the term may mean for theorists, educators and practitioners’ (Enslinn, Round and Thomas 2023: 1). In the discussion that follows (Research themes A and B), I examine the dynamic between literary media and practice-based research and its (potential) contribution to the digital literary humanities (Kiernan 2021; see also Murray 2018; Thomas *et al* 2023). This dialogic framing leads to questions around how writing culture(s) and communities have changed – and continue to change – and what opportunities might emerge from this emanant discourse.

The title of this thesis, ‘Content: Exploring the theory and practice(s) of literary media within a changing publishing marketplace’, refers primarily to the contemporary understanding of the word ‘content’ as ‘information that is expressed or shared’ (Collins dictionary online); a definition that can usefully (but not definitively) be applied to contemporary writing and publishing (Dush 2015). This broad definition can be refined to include, ‘...the ideas that are contained in a piece of writing, a speech, or a film’ (Cambridge dictionary online), thereby signifying an interdisciplinary framework of adaptation that includes communications, and creative, cultural and critical studies. In *The Digital Literary*

Sphere (2018) Simone Murray investigates some of the ways in which digital technology meets contemporary literary culture, which further contributes to a nuanced and expansive understanding of ‘content’ as a by-product of the marriage between the two. She notes that ‘the digital literary sphere’s ease of content creation by audiences demands that we radically extend Darnton’s circuit model into a distributed network’ (Murray 2018:178; Darnton 1982). Murray adds that ‘the digital literary sphere demands such an interdisciplinary mindset’ (Ibid) – a statement that is equally applicable to content creation. This constellation of connected concepts helps to contextualise the terms: content, literary media and the digital literary sphere. I suggest that they are also bound together because they are founded within a remediated, necessarily populist digital literary *public sphere* (Habermas 1964) and are cross-disciplinary and contemporary.

For the purposes of this thesis, I use the term ‘content’ to refer to information and experiences that are created with an end-user or audience in mind, often via digital media and platforms.³ Of course, content includes writing, but writing doesn’t always constitute ‘content’, since some forms of writing are functional or have little concern for audiences. Literature is a term generally applied to writing that is considered to have intrinsic artistic or intellectual merit – in other words, obtaining an audience is a by-product of its value, rather than the sole driver (Chandler and Munday 2020). But despite these points of difference, these days, content and literature often merge, and literature is sometimes submerged by content.

Former publisher Michael Bhaskar explains the relationship between publishing and content thus: ‘Content, not communication, must be the foundation, as content only becomes

³ This understanding of the term is drawn from practice-based conventions and theoretical foundations. While working as a creative and editorial director at a creative content studio (2015-2016), the shared understanding of ‘content’, based on industry norms and conventions, was that content constituted the container for narrative communications (visual and verbal). In *A Dictionary of Media and Communication*, Daniel Chandler and Rod Munday (OUP 2020) offer 11 definitions of content, the last three of which are particularly relevant for this discussion: ‘9. For McLuhan, the most noticeable aspect of a *medium that seems to constitute its message but which is actually another medium. For example, the content of *writing is *speech and that of print is the written word. 10. (online content, social media content, web content) Any material made available for *sharing *online, including *photographs, videos, *news, and *entertainment; 11 See Media Content’ (Chandler and Munday 2020: 260).

communication with a further intervention; publishing itself, not content alone, creates the act of communication...' (Bhaskar 2013: 87) He contends that, 'A theory of publishing requires a theory of content' (Ibid). Bhaskar's book *The Content Machine: Towards a Theory of Publishing from the Printing Press to the Digital Network* (2013) contributed to the shift in tone and audience (from academic to general) and a broadening of cultural parameters, in terms of the discourse surrounding the notion of books as (simply) another form of convergent content. Like *The Content Machine*, my work also brings a commercial understanding of visual and verbal branding and communication to the analysis of publishing and the literary industries (Kiernan 2018; Kiernan 2021; Kiernan 2023). It therefore contributes to the formation of new knowledge, in that it offers fresh insights into the remediated relationship between the production and consumption of literary content, publishing and technology – in other words, literary media (Kiernan 2021 and 2023; See also Bhaskar 2013).

This frame of reference aligns with publishing studies and literary media theory, with particular reference to the work of Bronwen Thomas and Jim Collins, respectively, to begin to produce a lexicon of literary media that draws on '...ecologies that are shaped by a 'convergence of literary, visual, and material cultures' (Collins 2010: 8; Thomas 2021). Collins and Thomas' dialogic convergence is instructive both in terms of form (literary, visual, material), content (the creative work) and context (the platform or format). This triangulation of interlinked ideas finds expression in the three research themes (A-C) in this integrative chapter, namely: literary media; approaches to scholarship and literary communities. At the heart of this enquiry is an abiding interest in the dynamic relationship between economic and social capital in relation to writing cultures, and in the potential for digital and post-digital media to enable literary culture to engage with reading and writing communities in innovative and democratic ways (Kiernan 2021; See also Bourdieu 2010).

The Remediated Field

In *Bring on the Books for Everybody*, Collins discusses the perceived tension between digital and print, saying that: ‘reading books and viewing electronic media [were] mutually antagonistic experiences’ (Collins 2010: 14). He alludes to the sense of loss that many expressed at the anticipation of the demise of print. However, Murray observes in literary studies a resistance to that ‘liminal zone between print and digital...’ and laments the lack of research examining ‘the way digital technologies publicize, market, and sell fiction – which is then read (perhaps) in print’ (Murray 2018: 8). I address this lack through my publications and practice-based research, asserting that the dynamic – between economic and cultural capital – has shifted, with the advent of digital communication and convergence culture (Kiernan 2023; see also Jenkins 2008). The ‘liminal’ space, in the context of my research, can be understood as a mixed media method which encompasses the interplay between print and digital, thereby moving beyond polarised binary positions. For instance, a work of literature can be understood as constituting a primary text from which content marketing takes its cue; equally, a literary text can be viewed as part of a value chain in which paratexts, adaptations and content, such as a film of a literary text’s production process or a social media promotional campaign, have both discrete and cumulative cultural value (Kiernan 2023). In this way, digital campaigns are able to reinforce the value of the printed text and vice versa. The reconfigured communication circuit therefore does more than simply re-evaluate the relationship between the producer and the consumer; it interrupts the sequential nature of the value chain, and the associated bastions of cultural capital and privilege (Kiernan 2023; Phillips and Kovač 2022; Squires and Ray Murray 2013). The value of the text can therefore be viewed as socially constructed *and* constructed socially, as it were, through online and offline community engagement (what Murray refers to as ‘book talk’ (Murray 2018: 2)).

The text as social product

Literary critic and editor Jerome McGann suggests that: ‘the text is not the product of lonely authorial intention... It is a “social product”. The publisher (particularly), the merchandiser, and the reader, as much as the author, can beget the literary work’ (McGann cited in Sutherland 1988: 580), meaning that generating or creating meaning happens in dialogue with other stakeholders, such as readers and publishers. The significance of social interactions in relation to literary media is also particularly relevant to the work of Bronwen Thomas in *Literature and Social Media* (2020). Thomas’ discussion centres on ‘the problem with “community”, and she cites Davies, who asserts that: ‘...the term community can easily be a way to encourage loyalty and monetise attention’ (Davies 2017 cited in Thomas 2020: 84; Kiernan 2023). Thomas goes on to state that: ‘Other objections to the term are based on the fact that the ephemeral and often asymmetrical relationships that form in online communities bear no resemblance to the idea of community as something rooted in time and place that provides a sense of stability and belonging to members’ (Kiernan 2023; see also Thomas 2020: 86).

The field of literary studies has also tended towards an asymmetrical treatment of literature in relation to media and cultural studies, which continue to be understood within an outdated ‘Field’ that foregrounds the merits – and value – of the former in contradistinction to the latter (Kiernan 2018 and 2021; see also Bourdieu 1987; Thompson 2010). Ensslin, Round and Thomas acknowledge this outdated hierarchical positioning in *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media*, highlighting the ‘...hitherto under-acknowledged tensions between literature and popular culture, as adaptations and transmedia franchises redraw boundaries between media forms and platforms, and problematise the privileging of the literary’ (Ensslin, Round and Thomas 2023; see also Murray 2012).

As discussed above (with references to publications 1-5 and case studies 1-3), my research constitutes a combination of practice-based research projects and critical analysis that can be read as a sustained critique that problematises the privileging of the literary as a

discourse that foregrounds fidelity to the original literary text, rather than embracing the counter-canonical approach of adaptation studies (Leitch 2017; Murray 2012).

Rear view mirror

The literary industries, and specifically trade publishing, have historically reinforced resistance to digital-first and convergent narrative production (Kiernan 2021; See also McFarlane 2007; Murray 2012; Stam 2004), and this perception of publishing as embodying McLuhan's 'rear view mirror' approach to change (McLuhan 2018) persists to some extent, despite evidence to the contrary (Kiernan 2021; See also Bhaskar 2013; Squires 2007). As I explain in chapter 6 of publication 1, 'From Fidelity Publishing to Playable Stories': 'In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan's "rear view mirror" theory is applied to the recurring dynamic between technological advances and consumer resistance' (Kiernan 2021). While the invention of the printing press in 1440 represented a moment of great cultural significance, since it meant that knowledge could be mass reproduced by a machine, it was viewed by some as heralding an era of misinformation. I go on to suggest that, 'In keeping with Zajonc's theory of the familiar, McLuhan's "rear view mirror" idea suggests that we "attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past" which signifies an ambivalence to technological change that is coloured by nostalgia and characterised by foot-dragging' (Kiernan 2021: 61; see also Meikle 2009: 87; McLuhan and Fiore 1967: 74–75).

The tension outlined in the quote above permeates intuitive resistance to the post-digital experience, understood as: 'the naturalization of pervasive and connected computing processes and outcomes in everyday life, such that digitality is now inextricable from the way we live while forms, functions and effects are no longer perceptible' (Albrecht, Fielitz & Thurston 2019:11). As I state in the chapter 1 of publication 1, 'We are now fully-fledged citizens of a post-digital world – a world in which almost all of our cultural consumption and communication takes place online' (Kiernan 2021:1). The sense of alienation that can result from our rapidly changing relationship with information technology is part of the reason why material objects such as books hold a particular appeal at this time. Cramer similarly suggests

that the Fluxus movement of the 1960s, in which artists' books were produced to be 'auratic, collectible objects' resembles post-digital counterculture today (Cramer 2012). He goes on to say that we are at a comparable historical point, 'where electronic books [...] are eclipsing print', which has resulted in a renaissance of artist bookmaking that 'emphasises, if not fetishizes, the analogue, tangible, material qualities of the paper object' (Cramer 2012; Kiernan 2021 and 2023). As I suggest in chapter 1 of publication 1: 'Analogue cultures such as physical books appeal because, in their printed form, they constitute 'static content', which temporarily stops us from disappearing down the digital rabbit hole' (Kiernan 2021: 2 and 91-92). My research offers a practice-based response to Cramer's expansive understanding of the text, while Chapter 8 of publication 1, 'Materiality and Post-Digital Storytelling' demonstrates a reflexive critical analysis of post-digital writing culture(s).

It seems that incomplete assumptions have been made about the value of digital technology as representing the future of books. As Barrios O'Neill explains: '...the innovation focus for publishing in recent decades has been on generating more and often faster informational experiences for consumers to manage [alongside] the need to generate income from reduced physical materiality' (Barrios O'Neill 2020). This view, as I have attempted to show through the examples in this submission, is limited and limiting. Innovators are becoming more iconoclastic, purpose-driven and ethically motivated, which is apparent in the advanced models of blended innovation that characterise enterprises such as Future Library and Visual Editions and indeed the work of many small press independent publishing houses (Kiernan 2021: 89-102; Kiernan 2023). In the context of book culture, the growth of carriage publishing can be seen as part of a post-digital desire for 'slow publishing' and analogue culture (Kiernan 2021: 89-102; Kiernan 2023; see also Cain 2017; Turkle 2017).

Research theme B: Double Game – How have changing approaches to scholarship and practice-based research informed the expanded field of literary media?

The next section discusses two linked aspects of practice-based research: Firstly, in relation to the expanding field of literary media; secondly, with reference to ‘creative approaches’ to practice-based research, and especially Barrows’ thinking around ‘knowing-in-doing’, which is discussed in her chapter ‘The Impossible Constellation: Practice as Research as a Viable Alternative’ in the context of publishing studies (Barrow 2016).

In *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media* (2023), the editors note that one of the early influencers for the cognate subject area of literary media is Katherine Hayles, who published *Electronic Literature: New horizons for the Literary* in 2008. As the editors navigate the etymology of literary media, they acknowledge a debt to Hayles, who they assert: ‘...challenged the rigid, exclusive and somewhat obsolete institutional and ideological connotations of the term “literature” in a fast-transforming media landscape’ (Enslinn, Round and Thomas 2023: 1). They go on to echo her call for a ‘broader category that encompasses the kind of creative ... artworks that interrogate the histories, contexts and productions of literature, including as well the verbal art of literature proper’ (Ibid; see also Hayles 2008: 45). Simone Murray similarly refers to what she views as this limiting disciplinary phenomena ‘as a conservatism in methodology’ (Murray 2018: 8). Murray goes on to assert that: ‘...scholarly dialogue that might have been expected to take place between and among book history/print culture studies, media studies, and digital literary studies has to date largely failed to occur’, partly as a result of departmental structures that are, ‘hamstrung by divergent entrenched research methodologies’ (Ibid). Ellen Wiles further contributes to this animated discussion, noting that: ‘Creative approaches to academic writing are characterised by scholars who distrust them as soft or insufficiently rigorous, implying simplicity or ease’ (Wiles 2021: 270).

The work of identifying the limitations of the structure of the field of digital literary studies can be viewed as an invitation for those working in this area to re-examine their own practice, perceptions and contribution to literary media. The next section explores the links between these calls for greater interdisciplinarity within digital literary studies and literary media in relation to my work in this field. It acknowledges the significance of communications and cultural theory for the development of digital literary media discourse, and, in conjunction with my publications and practice, contributes to a new way of researching and thinking about that shift (Kiernan 2006; 2011; 2021; 2023; see also Collins 2010; Murray 2018; Thomas 2020).

Literary media represents a broad church of narrative communication that embraces a diversity of digital disciplines and cultural forms, including ‘pop, fan and participatory culture’ (Ensslin, Round and Thomas 2023: 1) and therefore, as I suggest through my publications and case studies, invites the creation of a wider space for interdisciplinary practice-based research to occur (see publications 1-5 and case studies 6-9). The diversity of methodologies inherent in this frame of reference means that the group includes people with divergent viewpoints and approaches, which may be partly why practice-based research in the humanities is still somewhat underdeveloped. As Sharon Bell puts it: ‘...I have struggled to accommodate creative interests in tandem with the development of a "credible" research profile and increasingly demanding roles as a senior academic leader’ (Bell 2009: 253).

Practice as research

This PhD by Publication considers a range of texts, both in relation to their conditions of production and in relation to the ways in which the narrative encounter – so how the text is staged and/or produced, engaged with, and via which media or platform – affects how texts might be received by their audiences. As such, the dual approach here: ‘...Draws on the experience of producing creative works that have started with research (research-led practice) and works that have started with a creative project but have proved a rich field for theoretical exploration (practice-led research)’ (Bell 2009: 253).² Like cultural studies, which is

concerned with critically examining and reconfiguring the relationship between dominant and popular (often subordinated) cultures, practice-based research often subverts hierarchical conventions (since it operates from the ground up rather than from the top down, as it were) and ‘interrogate(s) the relationship between the academy and the rest of the social order...’ (Fiske 1991: 164).

Practice-based research has a rich heritage among women artists, makers and ethnographers and has particular (though not singular) relevance for women artists and writers, partly because of the historical expectations of women as care-givers and home-makers, alongside largely unacknowledged creative domestic labour: ‘It is a creativity which both produces objects such as quilts, diaries, or furniture arrangements but which is equally if not more productive in the practices of daily life, in the ways of dwelling, of walking, of making do’ (Fiske 1991: 158). As I note in the Introduction to *Writing Cultures and Literary Media*:

The penned markers of selfhood are as much in evidence in writing for the public, through journalism, publishing and social media, as through stories of everyday life expressed through journals, notes and lists. The act of writing, publishing and story-sharing cannot be neutral since stories are born into a system of cultural value that decodes narrative in relation to its mode of production. (Kiernan 2021: 16 and 99-101).

Cultural studies posits these creative practices as the stuff of everyday life and acknowledges the gendered signifiers of cultural representation and identity inherent within them. In ‘Cultural Studies and Everyday Life’, Fiske considers Bourdieu’s notion of the field in relation to the tension between theory and practice in the academy:

As Bourdieu (1977) points out, practices can circulate and reproduce culture without their meanings passing through discourse or consciousness. He distinguishes between practice and discourse, and notes somewhat sadly that to study practice we need to bring it to the level of discourse, but in doing so we change its ontological status, for a defining feature of practice is that it is not discourse (pp.110, 120). (Fiske 1991: 159).

The idea that practice must be elevated to the status of discourse, from a sociological perspective, infers that practice is inferior (lower down in the hierarchy) than discourse. I argue that this perspective is out of step with current thinking about the value of practice in

the academy, in terms of the interconnectedness of theory and practice in the construction of meaning. In *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Smith and Dean assert that the flow of knowledge and ideas between academic research and creative practice' should be regarded as 'bidirectional' (Smith and Dean 2009: 6). They refer to philosophical ontologist Heidegger's examination of 'the particular form of knowledge that arises from our handling of materials and processes (Bolt 2007: 30)' and his view that 'we come to know the world theoretically only after we have come to understand it through handling' (ibid). He argues '...that there can arise out of creative practice 'a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice (Bolt 2007: 29)' (Smith and Dean 2009: 6).

Although ontology is interested in the nature of existence from a philosophical perspective, contemporary critical perspectives around the interconnectedness of things, which question ontological mind-body dualism, might similarly be critiqued, with reference to the idea that theory and practice are mutually exclusive (Crane and Patterson 2001). Daisy Hildyard, for instance, whose philosophical novel *Emergency* is described by her publisher Fitzcarraldo Editions as being 'a novel about the dissolving boundaries between all life on earth', is interested in how theory and practice perform together on the page. Hildyard also expressed this view in an email exchange: 'I can see how a creative writing/practice research thesis could do that with the concept of interdisciplinary too (in that it's taking this idea of interdisciplinary and actually making it happen, moving somehow in the world)' (Hildyard, personal correspondence: 2023). Hildyard's assertion resonates with Fiske's suggestion that: 'practice should be allowed to expose the incompleteness of theory, to reveal the limits of its adequacy' (Fiske 1991: 165).

This counterpoint forms a recurring theme in my work (Kiernan 2021: 1-8 and 89-102; see also case studies 1-3) and is insightfully discussed in 'The Impossible Constellation: Practice as Research as a Viable Alternative' (Barrow 2016). Barrow notes that 'creative approaches' are the bedrock of practice-based research (Barrow 2016 cited in Kiernan 2021). With reference to the field of publishing studies, Barrow notes that this 'impossible

constellation' has yet to be fully assimilated into the academy, suggesting that unless the stars are aligned – or the dots connected – along the lines of pre-existing, peer-reviewed research (so, the field), they may be refuted or rejected by academics within that field. Barrow addresses this problem, explaining that practice as research 'is a kind of "practical knowing-in-doing", where insight, methodological rigour and originality are key, and might be shared with and learnt from other practice-based disciplines such as education and ethnography' (Barrow 2016: 25; Smith and Dean 2009).

Barrow's notion of 'practical knowing in doing' is often explored in the work of women writers who create literary media alongside more conventional publishing outputs, such as books. For example, Sophie Calle is an author, social ethnographer and conceptual artist, whose work includes psychoanalytic, psycho-geographic encounters and literary/photographic journals and collaborations (Calle 2003; 2007). More recently, Patricia Lockwood's work explores digital realities through ethnographic encounters (or netography) that offer insights into how online communities respond to social media (Lockwood 2019; 2021). For netography, Insta posts can be read as an expression of identity in much the same way as a hand-written letter (or marginalia), depending on how they are created, curated and critiqued (Kiernan 2021). Through these elastic understandings of practice-based research, the culturally and structurally iconoclastic work of writers such as Megan Boyle, Patricia Lockwood, Sophie Calle and Daisy Hildyard takes on a particular significance in light of the previously limiting frame of reference regarding the potential impact of practice as discourse. (Kiernan 2021; Kiernan 2023).

Boyle's *Liveblog*, for instance, can be read as a protracted critique of traditional communication circuits which privilege the notion of sequential narrative production and consumption (ie the novel) (Boyle 2018). Characterised by instantaneous communication, *Liveblog* can be read as an attempt to methodologically subvert literary conventions, and, as such, is part of the Alt Lit writing movement, which is (self) consciously influenced by the internet and popular culture. By adopting a more accessible writing style, authors such as Boyle and Lockwood seem to bridge the gap between academic research and the wider

reading public. These examples broadly illustrate the dynamic nature of literary culture and its continuous evolution in response to changes in communication technologies and cultural contexts. In doing so, they also highlight the importance of engaging with diverse writing styles and methodologies in order to better understand the complexity of post-digital cultural participation.

My own practice-based research (see publication 5 and case studies 1-3) has been informed by the approaches outlined above and also by a commitment to autotheoretical feminist creative practice. Autotheory has been described as ‘the commingling of theory and philosophy with autobiography’ (MIT website copy 2023), with reference to Lauren Fournier’s book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing and Criticism* (Fournier 2022). Fournier’s publisher describes her book thus: ‘Fournier argues that the autotheoretical turn signals the tenuousness of illusory separations between art and life, theory and practice, work and the self—divisions long blurred by feminist artists and scholars’ (<https://mitpress.mit.edu/9780262544887/autotheory-as-feminist-practice-in-art-writing-and-criticism/>: Accessed 28 October 2023). Fournier’s notion of ‘illusory separation’, is therefore significant both for the collapsing of conventional narrative norms in autofiction and in relation to interrogating the limitations of artificial disciplinary boundaries.⁴

My work has also attempted to push back against ‘illusory disciplinary separation’, while also acknowledging the kind of doubling impulses that can create limiting notions of what it means to be ‘either’ an academic and practitioner. For example, in publication 5, ‘Mad Girl’s Love Song: Reflections on routes into Writing, Reading and Mentoring’ (Kiernan 2016), I compare the work of singer-songwriter P J Harvey to that of poet Sylvia Plath: ‘Plath and Harvey’s doubling impulse, through divulging and judging, soliloquizing

⁴ As mentioned, autotheory is evident in the work of the interdisciplinary artists and writers whom I discuss in this portfolio of publications. They include Sophie Calle in *Exquisite Pain*, (Thames & Hudson, 2003); with Paul Auster in *Double Game* (Violette Editions, 2013); Daisy Hildyard in *The Second Body* (Fitzcarraldo, 2017), Rachel Whiteread in ‘House’ (installation, 1993); and Patricia Lockwood in ‘The Communal Mind: The Internet and Me’ (LRB, 2019). See also Rachel Cusk’s *Outline* (Faber 2018) and Karl Ove Knausgaard’s *My Struggle: A Death in the Family* (Vintage 2013), which I discuss in Chapter 7 of publication 1, ‘Marketing True Lies and Autofiction’, for further examples of genre-defining contributions to the fields of autofiction and autotheory (Kiernan 2021: 78-80).

and addressing an unnamed other, forms a central tension in their writing' (Kiernan 2016: 50). Publication 5 is perhaps the most overtly autotheoretical, in that it connects participant-observer experiences in relation to literary texts and literary media. The skills required of participant observers include observational note-taking, surveys and interviews as part the fieldwork, all of which have been applied and adapted for my own work in this field (see publication 5 and case study 3).

The self-reflexive and digitally-preoccupied work of Megan Boyle in her memoir *Liveblog* (2015) and Patricia Lockwood, both in her novel *No One Is Talking About This* (2021) and her articles in *The London Review of Books* (2019), are also relevant in terms of their methodologies, which align with experimental (and experiential) forms of literary ethnography (Boyle), autotheory (Hildyard) and netography (Lockwood) (Kiernan 2021: 81-3). Lockwood and Boyle position themselves as participant observers within their own narrative experience, emphasising "audience-oriented subjectivity", which is articulated in response to a particular (and often peculiar) experience of the digital public sphere (Randall 2008). In her article 'The Communal Mind: The Internet and Me', Lockwood asks: 'Why did the portal feel so private, when you only entered it when you needed to be everywhere? The amount of eavesdropping was enormous. Other people's diaries streamed around her...' (Lockwood 2019 cited in Kiernan 2021: 84). Lockwood is at once the observer and the observed; she is a participant in 'the portal' but also alienated by the lack of boundaries and privacy, and by her own scrolling voyeurism. As such, 'Lockwood seems to question the purpose of a remediated public sphere, in which the flattening of experiences she represents can be read as a "rejection of morality" (Burnham 2018: 88).' (Kiernan 2021: 84).

This duality of experience is similarly evident in Calle's work, which explores the hierarchy of gendered textual production through self-reflexive biographical practice, notably in her experimental memoir *Double Game* (Violette Editions 2007). *Double Game* can be read as a piece of performance art played out through a publishing experiment, in which Calle collaborated with novelist Paul Auster to intersperse the paperback format text from his novel *Leviathan* (1992) with her large format art book. Calle describes authorship as a performative, ritualistic behaviour that resonates with transformative dramatic experiences:

Since in *Leviathan*, Auster has taken me as a subject, I imagined swapping roles and taking him as the author of my actions. I asked him to invent a fictive character which I would attempt to resemble. I was, in effect, inviting Paul Auster to do what he wanted with me, for a period of up to a year at most (Calle cited in Martin, 2008, 198).

Calle's invitation sees Auster situated as both reader and co-author – much like an editor (Athill 2011). The dialogue between the dual narratives (*Leviathan* and *Double Game*) can be read as challenging the ontological hierarchy of narrative/metanarrative that is assumed to exist between (body) text and marginalia or indeed (body) text and illustrations (Kiernan 2021: 89-102).

To conclude, it is my view that creative/arts-based methods are vital for the inclusive representation of marginal accounts of lived professional experiences. Parsons and Chappell summarise the value of such an approach in 'A case for auto/biography' (Parsons and Chappell 2020):

The use of creative/art-based methods is 'an emerging qualitative research approach [that] refers to the use of any art form (or combinations thereof) at any point in the research process (Cole and Knowles 2001; Knowles and Cole 2008) in generating, interpreting, and/or communicating knowledge (cited in Boydell et al. 2012) (Parsons and Chappell 2020: 15).

They assert the value and significant of audience engagement, making research more accessible beyond academia and for facilitating conversations with participants (Parsons and Chappell 2020). This chapter and the case studies in this section have therefore sought to distinguish practice-based research from desk-based critical analysis, while also making the case for practice-based research as discourse.

Research theme C: Audience: Representation, reading communities and gendered genre tensions

In ‘The Growth of Reading Groups as a Feminine Leisure Pursuit: Cultural Democracy or Dumbing Down?’ (Kiernan 2011), I was keen to investigate the dominant patriarchal viewpoints of literary industry influencers, in response to what was perceived by some critics as the threat of popular or middlebrow culture for the traditional literary canon (Kiernan 2011; Kiernan 2018; Kiernan 2021; see also Barstow 2003). I examined the cultural impact of the growth of television book groups, such as Oprah’s Book Club, and tracked consistent negative patterns, in terms of the tone of voice and judgements of literary gatekeepers (such as critics), to media innovations and social trends that resulted in expanded readerships, with particular reference to women readers.⁵

Redressing this incomplete viewpoint from a feminist perspective has been a recurring theme in my research, which is also evident in an earlier publication, ‘No Satisfaction: Sex and the City, Run Catch Kiss, and the Conflict of Desires in Chick Lit’s New Heroines’ (Kiernan in Ferris and Young (eds) Routledge: 2006), which discussed the category and status of ‘women’s fiction’ within the literary canon. In ‘Instagram, Poetry and the Cult of the Amateur’ in *Writing Cultures and Literary Media* (Kiernan 2021), I go on to suggest that: ‘The characteristically informal and self-referential style of many Instapoets is at odds with the sorts of traditional critical literary expectations put forward by T. S. Eliot [et al]...’ (Kiernan 2021: 48). I argue that the significance of this apparent binary opposition is

⁵ ‘My starting point in this discussion is the premise that the cultural value ascribed to a given media text is often seen to be inversely proportionate to its popularity, so that the more popular the text, the less cultural value it is perceived to have. This appears to be the case with bookclubs – despite many of the texts selected belonging to the category of literary fiction. I will suggest that certain ‘feminine’ reading habits and preferences are given short shrift by some critics because of their association with mass media and ‘low-brow’ culture’ (Kiernan 2011: 124).

predicated on an assimilatory understanding of the idea of culture that largely conforms to an exclusionary western patriarchal aesthetic tradition:

Context is in many ways as significant as content here: women often read at home, entertain members of their book group at home, and watch daytime television at home (though daytime television is of course not solely the domain of women, since other demographics, such as students and the unemployed, are also consumers). In other words, mass market and other female ‘audiences’ (Kiernan 2011: 124).

Reader response studies

To better understand the cultural significance of popular fiction (and ‘women’s fiction’) within the publishing marketplace, reader response studies offer a useful method for locating the value of community building beyond the cultural elite (see publication 3). This approach produces meaning in relation to the tradition of cultural studies espoused by Stuart Hall, which approaches the task of cultural analysis from the position of recognising the relationship between the way people live, and the ways in which they produce and consume culture (Hall 2013).⁶ Marking a shift away from the Leavisite commitment to the authority of the text (an approach which necessarily privileged the privileged, as it were, and overlooked the point of view of the working classes), reader response studies allows audiences to make meaning through media texts in the context of their own lived experiences.

On publication, Radway’s *Reading the Romance* was deemed to be radical in that it marked a shift away from the authority of the text⁷, foregrounding instead the significance of the reader, in terms of their engagement with the text, as a form of resistance. In chapter 3 of publication 1, ‘Critics and Curators in a Socially Networked Age,’ I note that: ‘In *Reading the Romance* (1984) Janice Radway showed that the Reader-Response approach can also serve as an ethnographic tool capable of heat-mapping the reading behaviours of particular sociological groups against their lived experience outside of the rarified space of dominant cultural production.’ (Kiernan 2021: 23). *Reading the Romance* also put into question the

⁶ This interest in everyday culture is influenced by the work of Richard Hoggart (*The Uses of Literacy*) and Raymond Williams (*Keywords*).

⁷ See chapter 2, ‘Critics and Curators in a Socially Networked Age’ in Kiernan, A, 2021.

(gendered) assumption that the means of production are a greater signifier of social relations than media consumption (the act of reading). Radway's research found that a group of women who met to discuss romance fiction felt a greater sense of agency through the act of both reading romances (because the act of reading was an act of resistance) and the activity of meeting a group of readers to discuss ideas (because that allowed them to give voice to imaginative possibilities outside of their domestic and familial commitments). As such, the text can be understood as a radical catalyst, in certain (often social) circumstances, even if the content of the text is not perceived to be radical. As I noted in 'The Growth of Reading Groups as a Feminine Leisure Pursuit: Cultural Democracy or Dumbing Down?':

Ang and Radway explore those tensions between 'reaffirmation of patriarchy' in texts belonging to genre fiction, such as the romance, and the 'declaration of independence' made by women in the actual practice of reading, either in isolation or together with a reading group made up of women. (Kiernan 2011: 126; See also Radway 1991 and Ang 1995).

The ethnographic turn

This foregrounding of the importance of 'interpretative communities' is significant for writing culture and literary media, in terms of engaging with audiences (online and offline) (see publication 1, chapter 7). It can therefore be seen to contribute to an emergent canon of scholarship about publishing that is concerned with reading communities (consumption) rather than memoirs recounting the business of publishing and the creation of Great Literature by renowned male publishers – Tom Maschler, Archibald Constable, George Smith, John Blackwood, George Routledge, Frederick Macmillan, David Garnett, Ian Parsons, Allen Lane and Tom Rosenthal – through production (Sutherland 2005). These towering figures of the past are diametrically opposed to the image of the 'ordinary' female reader (Radway 1991; Hartley 2011) (see publication 3). Like embroidery to abstract expressionism, the historically gendered cultural assumptions delineating the significance of the iconic male publishers noted above and the more marginal figures of female editors and

‘middle-brow’ readers have historically underpinned the structure of the industry (Athill 2011; Driscoll 2014) (see case study 8).

To conclude, by investigating book communities, ‘I have sought to identify and defuse simplistic divisions between high and low culture and reading practices’ (Kiernan 2011). Advances in digital technology can be seen to catalyse engagement with literary media in ways that, to some extent enable the democratisation of culture, particularly in terms of gender. Therefore, I remain optimistic about the potential for digital and print cultures to evolve to reflect the diversity of a changing publishing marketplace.

Conclusion

As I set out in the introduction, the aim of this PhD by Publication has been to contextualise my body of work within an investigation of writing cultures and literary media that negotiates narrative in a post-digital sphere, and to make the case for its original contribution to knowledge. The objective of the study has been to better understand the field through the lens of practice-based research in the fields of publishing and creative writing as a way of contributing to the emergent field of literature in relation to applied literary media.

This integrative chapter has sought to demonstrate how literary media, practice-based research, and reading communities are interconnected in various ways. Literary media serves as a conduit for transmitting literary works to an expanding readership and plays a vital role in shaping reading experiences and fostering engagement with literature. Practice-based research involves using creative and artistic practices as a mode of inquiry and generating knowledge. In the context of literature, practice-based research often involves authors and scholars actively engaging in creative writing, digital media and literary creation as a means of exploring and generating new insights. A digital literary studies approach that is both contemporary and contextual is therefore, I propose, a valuable addition to the field.

As I have aimed to show, my contribution to knowledge is part of the discourse of literary media that has now established itself within the academy. This is evident, for example, in the contributions of more than 40 respected academics to *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media* (Ensslin, Round and Thomas 2023). My particular contribution has sought to connect contemporary publishing studies with an understanding of content creation and the promotional industries that offers new perspectives on the relationship between literature, culture, and society.

My research has examined artistic and commercial opportunities for both codex and content within a changing publishing marketplace and within the evolving field of literary media – or literary media studies. By embracing cognate disciplines such as philosophy,

visual cultures, and literary sociology, my work seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice in the field of literary studies, and specifically literary media. My research demonstrates how theoretical insights can be applied to real-world publishing scenarios, offering a deeper understanding of the complexities and dynamics of the field by examining issues such as power dynamics, cultural hierarchies, immersive experiences and the production of meaning in a post-digital world.

Looking to the future

After completing my PhD, I intend to continue researching the themes discussed above within a feminist, practice-based, self-reflexive and interdisciplinary way, by developing further writing and digital media projects and publications. I am also devising a new literary journal proposal titled *Literary Media*, which will seek to capture the emerging work of academics (including myself) and practitioners who are contributing to and shaping this inclusive and culturally significant discourse.

In terms of publishing futures, a wider range of stories, characters, and themes reflecting various cultures, identities, and experiences, as writing cultures prioritize representation and inclusivity, is emerging, and the diversification of modes of production and consumption are positive:

1. Crowdsourcing platforms are likely to become more prevalent, enabling collective storytelling and co-creation with readers, which will go some way to promoting greater diversity, in terms of both production and reception of stories.
2. Advances in technology are resulting in more interactive and immersive writing and narrative experiences, such as *Zombies Run!* (Alderman 2011). Augmented reality (AR), virtual reality (VR), and mixed reality (MR), and AI are being integrated into storytelling, allowing readers to engage with narratives in new ways.
3. Traditional genre boundaries will continue to blur as writers experiment with hybrid forms and cross-genre storytelling. This will lead to the creation of unconventional narratives that engage readers in unique ways.

In tandem with these developments, some of the most resilient digital storytelling projects launched over the last decade have succeeded because they create enhanced narrative experiences. The success of experiential literature (a subset of literary media) also offers market insights for the (Anglo-American) academy, which is currently facing a decline in recruitment to English Literature (and other Humanities) degrees. In his recent article titled ‘The End of The English Major’ in *The New Yorker* (2023) Nathan Heller investigates the causes of this decline through interviews with leading American literary scholars such as James Shapiro, an English professor at Columbia, who states that: ‘Technology in the last twenty years has changed all of us’ (Heller 2023). Heller concludes that we read fewer novels because we are reading websites and consuming content in other ways, and that students are drawn less to what they view as the reductive idea of canon (in terms of identity politics and future career mapping) and more to the expansive arena of content (in areas such as strategy and AI innovation). I believe that the rise in literary media offers a route through the discipline of literary studies that might better equip students with the digital skills to create engaging content despite – and perhaps in response to – the transitional post-digital reality.

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Appendices

PhD by Publication submissions

1. Kiernan, A. 2021. *Writing Cultures and Literary Media: Publishing and Reception in the Digital Age*. Palgrave

DOI: <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-030-75081-7>

This book investigates the impact of the digital on literary culture through the analysis of selected marketing narratives, social media stories, and reading communities. Drawing on the work of contemporary writers, from Bernardine Evaristo to Patricia Lockwood, each chapter addresses a specific tension arising from the overarching question: How has writing culture changed in this digital age? By examining shifting modes of literary production, this book considers how discourses of writing and publishing and hierarchies of cultural capital circulate in a socially motivated post-digital environment. *Writing Cultures and Literary Media* combines compelling accounts of book trends, reader reception, and interviews with writers and publishers to reveal fresh insights for students, practitioners, and scholars of writing, publishing, and communications.

Reviews

‘In this engaging and timely account, Kiernan reflects on the prospects for contemporary writing cultures in a post-digital, post-COVID world. Drawing on her own unique and varied experiences of the contemporary arts world as writer, publisher, and critic, Kiernan offers refreshing insights not only into the opening up of the cultural industries, but also their shortcomings. *Writing Culture in a Digital Age* discusses some of the most innovative writing from recent years, including fiction, nonfiction, and poetry, and draws on a wide range of cultural sources including the author’s own survey of industry insiders.’ (Professor

Bronwen Thomas, Head of the Narrative, Culture and Community Research Centre at Bournemouth University, UK, and author of *Literature and Social Media* (2020))

‘In this thoughtful and wide-ranging book, Anna Kiernan explores the impact of our digital times on writing both on and off the screen. This timely addition to the scholarship on publishing, storytelling, and storytellers is sure to provoke discussion within academia and beyond.’ (Sarah Franklin, novelist and Senior Lecturer in Publishing at Oxford International Centre for Publishing Studies, UK)

‘An engaging examination by Anna Kiernan of today’s writing cultures. We discover how writers tell their stories in a world of social media, self-publishing, and digital consumption. I very much enjoyed the book.’ (Professor Angus Phillips, Director of the Oxford International Centre for Publishing, UK, and author of *Inside Book Publishing* (1988) and *Turning the Page* (2014))

‘This is a pragmatic and richly informed reflection on what literary writing was, is, and might become—both in relation to technology, and in response to emerging societal configurations. An important read for academics, writers, and publishers alike.’ (Dr Danielle Barrios-O’Neill, Head of Information Experience Design, Royal College of Art, UK)

‘Kiernan presents a timely perspective of contemporary relationships between reader, author, and text. A must read for writers and editors.’ (Dr Amy Lilwall, Novelist and Lecturer in Creative Writing, Lincoln University, UK)

‘This fascinating book illuminates a myriad of ways in which digitalization has shaped contemporary literary culture, from criticism and curation to publication and publicity. Kiernan takes a lively, interdisciplinary approach to her subject, referencing a wide range of dynamic writers and thinkers, drawing on her own varied experience in the literary world and offering plenty of valuable insights.’ (Dr Ellen Wiles, Lecturer in Creative Writing at the University of Exeter, UK, novelist, and author of *Live Literature: The Experience and Cultural Value of Literary Events from Salons to Festivals* (Palgrave Macmillan 2021))

2. Kiernan, A, 2023. 'Small press publishing in a post-digital world: Creative campaigns and promotional opportunities.' Thomas, Bronwen, Round, Julia and Ensslin, Astrid (editors). In *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media*.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003119739>

This chapter focuses on the relationship between 'the field of restricted production' – understood here as literary and limited-edition print publications – and creative digital marketing campaigns, with particular reference to the promotional opportunities afforded to the former by the latter. For Visual Editions, for instance, the challenge of publishing *Tree of Codes*, an intricate die-cut sculptural object (or book) by Jonathan Safran Foer, formed the basis of their marketing campaign. Therefore, while its success was bound up in its exclusivity within the restricted field, *Tree of Codes* reached its market through digital communication, and specifically via a short promotional film made about the printing process which has garnered more than 83,000 views on YouTube.

In terms of book publishing, Pierre Bourdieu's understanding of the field of restricted production (Bourdieu 1993, 115) is particularly relevant to specialist small press ventures that create limited edition books with high production values. Such publishers range from The Hogarth Press, the publishing house that Leonard and Virginia Woolf founded in 1917, to Visual Editions, a contemporary creative agency whose portfolio includes limited edition publishing experiments that accrue symbolic capital through small audiences of cultural producers.

John B. Thompson noted in 2010 that, at book proposal stage, publishers now want their authors to engage digitally: '...for in the internet age, these new forms of online marketing are becoming more and more decisive in shaping the visibility of books and their fate' (Thompson 2010, 17). The pre-publication social media engagement around the text forms a paratextual metanarrative for many authors, who tweet about their forthcoming books, festival appearance and public engagements and who promote digital content, such as Safran Foer's film. Understood in this way, promotional digital content can therefore be

linked into the publishing chain or value chain, which, as Thompson explains, adds value to the developing product (the book, for instance) at each stage of the process (Thompson 2010, 15). To quote the overview of *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media*, in addition to discussing creative digital campaigns, this chapter ‘examines media ... ecologies that are shaped by a ‘convergence of literary, visual, and material cultures’ (Collins 2010: 8).”

3. Kiernan, A. 2011. ‘The growth of reading groups as a feminine leisure pursuit: Cultural democracy or dumbing down?’, in *From Salons to Cyberspace: Readings of Reading Communities*, Denel Rehberg Sedo (editor), Palgrave: Basingstoke.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230308848>

This chapter was a product of two intersecting observations regarding the field of literary production and literary media. The first was to do with the business of publishing: I developed a sense of pragmatism in relation to business opportunities that was sharpened when I worked in trade book publishing during a period of time characterised by corporate takeovers (Squires 2007; Collins 2010). The second was concerned with the range of ways in which gender has historically informed how the literary industries produce and showcase writing by women, in terms of media, marketing and promotion, and how gender affects how readers are represented and addressed in the literary media – so, in terms of reception. These overlapping concerns both foregrounded, in different ways, an interest in the democratisation of culture, understood here as increasing opportunities for non-traditional audiences to access to arts and culture through non-traditional platforms (such as TV book groups) and processes (such as posting on fan fiction forums or social media). This interest in the erosion of traditional cultural gatekeepers (such as literary critics, publishers and journalists) has become a central concern in my practice-based research. This approach is informed by auto-ethnographic perspectives on publishing and ‘writing cultures’ (Wiles 2021; Clifford and Marcus 2010). It is an interest that has shifted its focus as writing culture has adapted over the last twenty years.

4. Kiernan, A. 2018. 'Futurebook Critics and Cultural Curators in a Socially Networked Age' in *The Digital Critic: Literary Culture Online*, Robert Barry, Houman Barekat & David Winter (editors), New York: OR Books.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt207g899>

This chapter examines the evolving roles of cultural intermediaries and cultural curators within social media environments. By examining online interactions about books and literary culture it considers how digital communities have disrupted traditional power structures within the publishing industry, in terms of both cultural and financial capital. Drawing on James Curran's methodology in 'Literary editors, social networks and cultural tradition', this chapter investigates the changing role, identity and characteristics of the author and reviewer within a digitally networked marketplace.

As cultural intermediaries, literary critics have historically influenced the consumer behaviours of prospective readers. But given that distributed authorship has catalyzed a shift in publishing practice and peer-to-peer online reviewing has become a commonplace destination for book seekers, the notion of a triad of production and reception (author-publisher-reviewer) has become singularly eroded.

Book publishing, and the marketing and publicity which surrounds the event of publication, has shifted its emphasis too. There has been much debate about digital undercutting print over the past decade, fuelled in part by tensions resulting from Google's digitisation project, Amazon's domination of the e-book project and the shift in perception and sales around self-publishing. To some extent, this oppositional discourse has moved on to make discursive space for more creative possibilities emerging from the digital landscape, in which the most powerful advocates, compelling campaigns and influential cultural intermediaries sometimes emerge from unexpected places and through unexpected influencers. As social media marketer Mark Fidelman asserts, 'For me, there are no "professional" critics that matter anymore. In our new social world, the crowd must decide.' (Fidelman, 2012)

5. Kiernan, Anna. 2016. 'Mad Girl's Love Song': Reflections on routes into reading, writing and mentoring. In Gowar, Mick (editor), *Book 2.0*, Volume 6, Issue 1-2, Dec 2016, p. 47 – 57

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1386/btwo.6.1-2.47_1

'Mad Girl's Love Song', the title of the poem by Sylvia Plath, forms the starting point of this reflective article, because it captures the interdisciplinarity that characterizes my practice and pedagogy, in terms of writing and collaborative working. This article draws on various creative writing methods in response to work by, and projects undertaken with, a range of writers, journalists, musicians and artists. Beginning by re-examining Dorothea Brande's seminal text *Becoming a Writer* (1981) as a means of identifying the tensions writers often experience between their 'creative' and 'critical' selves, the article concludes that cross-disciplinary working may offer a way of expanding on Brande's notion of these binary selves in favour of a creative/critical/collaborative self.

Case studies

The publications in this submission are linked to practice-based projects and research.

Case study 1: The Literary Platform

Overview

The Literary Platform is an internationally renowned agency working with books and technology. It was listed in the British Council Creative Economy's Top Ten UK Creative Entrepreneurs (2013), and in *The Guardian* Professional/h.Club 100 'most innovative and influential' in the creative industries as well as in the Fortuna 50 Index of the UK's fastest growing female-led small businesses (2015). In 2019, I took over the management of The Literary Platform and relaunched it as a creative incubator, digital magazine, publisher and mentorship/membership hub (The Lit Salon) for emergent, diverse writers and publishers.

Since taking over TLP in 2019 we have been awarded grants from Arts Council England (2019) and The Royal Society of Arts (RSA, 2022); I was awarded funding from the Education Incubator at Exeter University and was also made a Fellow (2021) and was awarded funding through the Excellence Initiator Fund (Exeter University and the University of British Columbia (UBC), 2022). Through these awards, we have been able to collaborate with students and staff at UBC (and previously illustrators at Falmouth University) to support the publication of *The Lit*, TLP's digital magazine, and *The Tilt*, a collection of new writing in translation. TLP has recently recruited a new Editorial and Innovation Board (2023), which includes respected scholars of creative writing and publishing from the universities of Falmouth, Lincoln, Stirling and LCC. We have published five issues of our magazine, which has featured the work of distinguished international writers and publishers. We have brought together writers, editors, artists, graphic designers and students to showcase narrative explorations across artforms.

At The Literary Platform, we published *The Tilt: An Anthology* as a limited collectable print edition and also as a downloadable, printable PDF. The book features a QR code which readers can scan in order to listen to translated audio versions of the stories published in the book. By expanding formats in this way, these works engage with one of the central themes in my research, namely the possibilities for print and digital culture in a digital age.

Relevance to PhD by publication

Managing the relaunch, rebrand and development of The Literary Platform represents a substantial ongoing piece of practice-based research, which links directly to the publications in this PhD submission. TLP has an international legacy and brand identity within publishing, writing cultures and literary media. I have built on this heritage by bringing in experts in design and creative content (agencies Venn and Stranger Collective and publisher No Bindings) and co-director Hazel Beevers, a creative consultant with expertise in PR and advertising. This shift from traditional publishing, through digital publishing to content

creation, directly reflects the journey manifest in the title of this submission, namely:
Content: Writing Cultures and Literary Media in a Changing Publishing Marketplace.

Outputs

- Kiernan, A. (2019) Entrepreneurship and The Literary Platform. Creative Entrepreneurship Forum, South Bank University. Hosted by Cultural Capital Exchange.
- Kiernan, A. (2018) 'Distributed authorship, literary critics and cultural curators in a socially networked age' (In press). Publishing in a changing media environment, Sorbonne in Florence.
- Kiernan, A. and James, B. E. (2017) 'Reimagining book concepts for digital audiences'. Books, Publishing and Libraries Research Network. Imperial College, London.
- Kiernan, A. (2016) 'The Killer and the Poet: Rethinking online writing'. National Association of Writers in Education conference, Stratford.
- Kiernan, A. (2016) 'Literary editors and peer-to-peer book reviewers: Rethinking the role of cultural intermediaries in a socially networked age'. Birkbeck College.
- Kiernan, A. (2015) 'Crowdsourcing and the social benefits of community publishing'. Beyond the Book conference, Sorbonne in Florence.
- Kiernan, A. (2012) Researching Readers Online. Invited participant for the AHRC network symposium. Bournemouth University.
- Kiernan, A. (2012) 'Why has Arts Council funding for literature risen 9.9% amid the cuts?' Book Cultures, Book Events, Stirling University.

Funding

- 2022-2023 Awarded Accelerator funding for joint project between The Literary Platform (TLP), Exeter University and the University of British Columbia (UBC).
- 2022 Awarded seed funding from the Royal Society of Arts for TLP project/event.
- 2021-2022 Awarded funding by Education Incubator creative project (TLP).
- 2019 Awarded £44,800 by Arts Council England for The Literary Platform.

Websites

<https://www.printmag.com/book-covers/the-tilt-anthology-questions-publishing-in-six-chapter-set/>

<https://theliteraryplatform.com/magazine/>

<https://www.agile-rabbit.com/event/creative-responses-to-climate-change/>

<https://www.thepublishingprofile.com/post/anna-kiernan>

<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/literary-platform-relaunches-44k-cash-injection-ace-1111166>

Our publications (which include podcasts in translation):

<https://theliteraryplatform.com/news/2021/03/welcome-to-the-tilt-an-anthology-of-new-writing/>

<https://www.nobindings.co.uk/shop/p/the-tilt>

Mentee article: <https://www.thebookseller.com/blogs/outside-echo-chamber-1273545>

<https://theliteraryplatform.com/content/uploads/2021/03/Print-at-home-compressed.pdf>

<https://twitter.com/TheLitPlatform> (16.8 thousand followers).

<https://www.printmag.com/book-covers/the-tilt-anthology-questions-publishing-in-six-chapter-set/>

Coverage (TLP)

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/apr/29/technology-literary-platform>

<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/literary-platform-explore-publishing-experiments>

<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/stephen-fry-judge-literary-platform-comp>

*<https://www.thebookseller.com/news/literary-magazines-increasingly-focusing-diverse-and-debut-authors-1265115>

<https://theliteraryplatform.com/news/2017/03/tlps-london-book-fair-digital-round-up/>

Case study 2: Creating new Fictions through Immersive Storytelling

Overview

In 2016, I was awarded funding from the Cultural Capital Exchange to develop a narrative virtual reality installation, exhibition and accompanying text in a project titled: ‘Creating new Fictions through Immersive Storytelling’. I gave a talk at the Tech Theatre at The London Book Fair (the global marketplace for rights negotiation and the sale and distribution of content across print, audio, TV, film and digital) titled ‘Reimagining book concepts for digital audiences: How *Grief is The Thing With Feathers* inspired a virtual reality story’.

Together with Ben James, then creative director of Jotta, we created *And the memory fills all space*⁸. The VR project was intended to communicate the all-encompassing sense of grief that one can feel after a significant loss, such as a bereavement. Our exploration of loss infused the project in different ways, through the source material, the poetry soundtrack and the experiential aspects of the VR immersion. Readers’ experiences were built within a games engine in order to construct a virtual manifestation of their imagined environment and, once constructed, the participants’ environments were stitched together to form one virtual environment that could then be explored by users through an Oculus Rift headset. A soundtrack was overlaid with the voice of a narrator abstractly referencing the five stages of grief by way of a poem (Kübler-Ross, 2008).⁹ The result was an experiential text, reconfigured into a deconstructed physical environment that could be explored in a non-linear fashion by users.

One of the project’s aims was to explore ways of engaging emergent or hard-to-reach readers through literary story worlds that could be experienced in a multi-sensory or immersive way. Part of the reason that is the case is because accessibility is still often understood in terms of adjustments such as large print, whereas, in fact, accessibility might be expanded to include the quality of the experiences that non-readers and those who can no longer read (such as people with dementia) have with the text(s) (Shaffi and Wood 2014). Virtual reality is therefore a natural platform for exploring this intention, since each

⁸ For visual identity, see: <http://jotta.com/project/tcce> See also: <https://clare-brooks.com/and-the-memory-fills-all-space>

participant would experience the story world differently in an iterative and individual way, which would be partly affected by the sense of temporarily relinquishing control that VR experiences prompt.

Relevance to PhD by publication

The funding for this project allowed us to explore narrative agency within playful, immersive and inclusive digital contexts such as virtual reality. We felt that there was significant potential for enhancing engagement with literary texts through non-traditional media as this was (and remains, to some extent) an area that had yet to be fully expressed, explored or embraced within publishing as a literary endeavour and within wider educational and cultural contexts.

Outputs

Kiernan, A. and James, B. E. (2017) 'Reimagining book concepts for digital audiences: How Grief is The Thing With Feathers inspired a virtual reality story' London Book Fair, Tech Theatre.

Kiernan, A. (2016) Awarded £5000 by The Culture Capital Exchange for VR storytelling. Cultural Capital Exchange funding bid - <https://wearetheexchange.org/awards/the-exchange-collaborative-research-awards-round-2-awardees-announced/>

Exhibitions and events

Kiernan, A and James, B. (2017) 'And the memory fills all space'. Bussey Building, Peckham, London. With Jotta. Part-funded by ACE & The Cultural Capital Exchange.

Kiernan, A. and Goodwin, A. (2016) 'The Museum of Momentos', Cultshare Summer Show, Falmouth.

Kiernan, A. (2016). Exhibition essay featured in *Moth* - https://moth.org.uk/Four-Deadlines-A-Dinner_Publication

Case study 3: Pick me Up and MAI

Overview

I wrote *Pick Me Up* between 2012 and 2014. *Pick me Up* is an illustrated poetry book that was created in collaboration with renowned illustrator Harriet Lee Merrion¹⁰. *Pick Me Up* (2014) was published by Atlantic Press Books, a small press independent publisher that specialised in limited edition art and poetry books. The book was originally published as a limited edition in print and was later featured online in MAI, a peer-reviewed feminist and visual culture journal for which I am a consulting editor.

Relevance to PhD by publication

‘Drawing on insights from cross-disciplinary case studies, from small press editions and artefacts to passion-project publishing, this chapter explores the relationship between people and the stories they tell and between ethnography and post-digital writing culture.’

Materiality and Post-Digital Storytelling

The relevant headings within that are ‘slow books’; ‘paper objects’; ‘post-digital writing culture’. One of the poems, titled “The beaten track” was inspired by artist Rachel Whiteread’s experiments with space and loss and, more generally, with the art of printing.

Gendering the process of embossing through this printing lexicon posits the female as empty space and the male as the paper being pushed into that space, which links back to the dual articulation of architectural ‘negative space’ and the silent domestic space that Whiteread alludes to in her work.

For *Pick me Up*, publisher Steve Braund wanted the paper to be part of the narrative in a subtle way. However, the idea of the connectedness between object and narrative is something that you can find in any of Atlantic Press’s books. Helene Pertl’s book *The Case*,

for instance, about a woman “falling apart” emotionally, and was designed to disintegrate over time because it uses ‘unstable binding’. As Stephanie Black points out in ‘Rear view mirror’: ‘it’s a quietly violent book, a catastrophe made poetic’ (Black 2012). Such experiments with form are part of a counter-canon that Ong alludes to in his discussion of the importance of typography for concrete poetry: ‘E. E. Cummings’s untitled *Poem No. 276* (1968) about the grasshopper disintegrates the words of its texts and scatters them unevenly about the page until at last letters come together in the final word “grasshopper”’. (Ong 1982, 130)

Outputs

Pick me up was featured in MAI. Readers were invited to:

‘Read extracts from briefing notes and exchanges about poems published in 2014 in *Pick Me Up* by Anna Kiernan (poet) & Harriet Lee-Merrion (illustrator).

In Part One and Part Three, you will find the poet’s reflection on two poems, ‘The robot nursemaid domain and ‘Bloomsday is cod’. Part Two offers the illustrator’s response to the first title. The commentary illuminates personal and cultural gendered contexts of creative work by women.’

<https://maifeminism.com/pick-me-up-poems-extracts-briefing-notes/>

Chapter

Kiernan, A. (2023) ‘Small press publishing in a post-digital world: Creative campaigns and promotional opportunities.’ Thomas, Bronwen, Round, Julia and Ensslin, Astrid (editors). In *The Routledge Companion to Literary Media*. (Routledge, under contract).

Article

Kiernan, A. (2016) ‘Mad Girl’s Love Song: Reflections on routes into reading, writing and mentoring’. *Journal: Book 2.0*, 6 (1 & 2), Intellect Books.

<https://theschoolofcommunicationdesign.wordpress.com/tag/falmouth-university/>

Conference papers

Kiernan, A. (2018) 'The habit of collaborating: Reflections on routes into reading, writing and mentoring in a digital age' (Published). Great Writing International Creative Writing Conference. Imperial College, London.

Kiernan, A. (2014) 'Pick Me Up: Rethinking creative writing from a textural perspective' (Published). Birkbeck College, Perversions of Paper.
<https://archivefutures.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/perversions-of-paper-newspaper.pdf>

Exhibitions

Kiernan, A. (2014) *Pick Me Up* (illustrated by Harriet Lee-Merrion) exhibited at Falmouth Art Gallery & at the Tiny Pencil exhibition As Above, So Below.

Kiernan, A. (2015) The Museum of Momentos. Cultshare Summer Show, Penryn.

Reviews and media:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/s01-episode-04-artist-winifred-freeman-anna-kiernan/id1477616187?i=1000457639393>

<https://theschoolofcommunicationdesign.wordpress.com/tag/falmouth-university/>

<https://asabovesobelowshow.tumblr.com/post/89978630464/pick-me-up-interview-with-anna-kiernan-poet>

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/s01-episode-04-winifred-freeman-anna-kiernan-glyn-winchester/id1477616187?i=1000457639393>

<https://maifeminism.com/author/anna-kiernan/>

'A gorgeously meditative collection that carries moments of surprise, explosions even, that are delightful... Kiernan's magpie instinct turns up some diamonds, and hers is certainly an interesting voice to listen out for.' *Poetry Wales*

'Very trim and nice, and I like the poetry.' Sebastian Carter, Editor, *Parenthesis*.

'This book of poems is beautiful.' Tara Bergin, author of *This is Yarrow* (Carcenet).

‘How long have you been writing poetry? I like them in different ways. I think you have something.’^[1]_[SEP]Blake Morrison.

‘This beautiful book...is a real treat.’ Dr Emily Orley Senior Lecturer, formerly Roehampton University

‘Pick me up was a delight, filled with flowing, intriguing, poised and peculiar (in a good way!) words.’ Gina Sherman, Apples and Snakes (performance poetry organization).

‘This beautiful and silky white chapbook brings together the evocative words of Anna Kiernan and the stunning images of Harriet Lee-Merrion...the images and words inform one another and create a kind of conversation.’ www.itsnicethat.com

‘I love this poem.’ Dr Mimi Thebo, Novelist and Reader in Creative Writing, Bristol University