

# Academic Books of the Future: *Something Misunderstood*

*A Panel Presentation by Richard Fisher*

*Wolfson College Cambridge*

*to*

*Futurebook*

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*Something Understood* Scholarly Communication

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Over thirty years' experience at Cambridge UP, latterly as  
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# Academic Book Publishing

## *Something Misunderstood?*

- 1) Publisher continuities, and general academic exposure to publishers only, has placed overmuch emphasis on the wrong things...NB at least 80% of academic book materials in arts and social sciences are still sold in print form worldwide
- 2) Between 25% - 50% of 'book revenues' goes to intermediaries, around the world, and these have changed far more than publishers, in the past two decades, but have been very little analysed, and nor has their impact on the overall scholarly eco-system
- 3) Such changes have been a response, above all, to *scale*, and the vastly increased body of book-length research seeking effective dissemination around the world

# The Permanence of Scholarly Book Brands

- (very) High entry costs relative to publishing opportunities
- Long-term gestation of and investment in core outputs
- Complex interaction of career, tenure, outputs and reputation, with scholarly conservatism *reinforced* in the UK by successive RAE/REF exercises and by growing metricisation
- The continued, surprising (?) survival of University Presses, especially in North America
- The cautious authorial response to digital opportunity, if anything embedded by the rise of the 'digital humanities'

# What about the development, consolidation and mutation of...

- Booksellers (e-tail and physical)
- Wholesalers
- Distributors
- Sales Agents
- Library Suppliers
- Aggregators
- Multi-publisher platforms

Let alone...

- Data and Impact analysts
- Research network agencies
- Bibliographic data agencies
- Funder compliance managers
- Etc etc etc

# Looking Ahead

- At present, we have numerous, very welcome small-scale Open Access publisher experiments, but these remain artisanal, cottage-sized responses to what is a global challenge of academic production (over-production) on a massive industrial scale
- Growing systematic and operational frictions exist (arguably more than with serials) in the intersection of book publishers, libraries, readers and authors, and our focus should be there, in thinking about scholarly communication (falsely distinguished from publication, certainly in the books realm)
- As it will be for the second phase of the AHRC/BL project