

BIBLIODIVERSITY

SUSAN HAWTHORNE
A MANIFESTO
FOR INDEPENDENT
PUBLISHING

Bibliodiversity can be read as a manifesto for the defence and promotion of diversity in all its forms, but also as a master class in ethics.

—Juan Carlos Sáez C., Director Gerente,
JC Sáez Editor, Chile

This passionate, challenging and highly readable manifesto champions the vital role of international, independent publishers who give voice to ‘the risky, the innovative, the controversial, the marginal and the imaginative voices’.

—RICHARD SMART, Consultant for Independent Publishers Committee,
Australian Publishers Association

Susan Hawthorne’s insightful and warm-hearted essay argues for a wide landscape of independent publishing to balance what is called ‘mainstream’, meaning the male power of big money.

—GERLINDE KOWITZKE and HILKE SCHLAEGER,
Frauenoffensive, Munich, Germany

This manifesto was written with the systemic complexity of the challenge of survival of our species in mind. Susan Hawthorne warns us brilliantly from start to finish to recognize the vital interdependence of all living systems. *Bibliodiversity* can be read as a manifesto for the defense and promotion of diversity in all its forms, but also as a master class in ethics and testimony ‘to free one’s self ... and not to be impeded’.

—JUAN CARLOS SÁEZ C., Director Gerente, JC Sáez Editor, Chile

In *Bibliodiversity* Susan Hawthorne explores the present and future impacts of globalization, digital publishing, censorship (including self-censorship), the declining importance of reviews, monopoly-controlled distribution systems, and social media niche market promotion. She argues for the voices of diverse and marginalised people to be heard and for fair trade and fair speech rather than free trade and free speech.

—NANCY WORCESTER, Professor Emerita, Department of Gender &
Women’s Studies, University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA

This is a huge and interesting work; a precious testimony to explore and understand bibliodiversity from the point of view of a feminist publisher. Bravo!

—LAURENCE HUGUES, Directrice,
Alliance internationale des éditeurs indépendants Paris, France

Bibliodiversity should be mandatory reading for anyone within the publishing industry and core curriculum for all students of publishing to ensure sustainability for the industry. Whether you are a publisher, bookseller, librarian or writer, you are above all a reader, and you each have a responsibility to encourage bibliodiversity—start playing your role today by reading this manifesto.

—MARY MASTERS, General Manager, Small Press Network, Australia

Susan Hawthorne's ideas are brilliant. Independent publishing feeds the cultural identity of our society as well as providing a source of income and satisfaction for writers, editors, and designers. This book must be read and distributed far and wide so that everyone understands the challenges but supports the joy!

—LISA HANRAHAN, Convenor, Independent Publishers Committee,
Australian Publishers Association



Photo by Renate Klein, Frankfurt Book Fair, 2013

Susan Hawthorne has worked in the book industry for more than thirty years as a writer, festival organiser, reviewer, editor, publisher and mentor. In 1991, she co-founded Spinifex Press with Renate Klein, after working as an editor for Penguin Australia for four years. She has written extensively about the industry, co-organised digital training for small and large publishers, taught Publishing Studies and Creative Writing, and has been an active member of peak bodies for publishers and writers. She is a member of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA), PEN Melbourne, Poetry Australia, Small Publishers Network (SPN) and on the Independent Publishers Committee of the Australian Publishers Association (APA). Since 2011, she has been the English-language Coordinator for the International Alliance of Independent Publishers based in Paris. She is Adjunct Professor in the Writing Program at James Cook University and Publisher at Spinifex Press.

Other books by Susan Hawthorne

non-fiction

Wild Politics: Feminism, Globalisation and Bio/diversity (2002)

The Spinifex Quiz Book (1993)

poetry

Lupa and Lamb (2014)

Valence: Considering War through Poetry and Theory (2011, chapbook)

Cow (2011)

Earth's Breath (2009)

Unsettling the Land (with Suzanne Bellamy, 2008, chapbook)

The Butterfly Effect (2005)

Bird and Other Writings on Epilepsy (1999)

The Language in My Tongue (1993)

fiction

Limen (2013, verse novel)

The Falling Woman (1992/2004)

anthologies

Horse Dreams: The Meaning of Horses in Women's Lives (with Jan Fook and Renate Klein, 2004)

Cat Tales: The Meaning of Cats in Women's Lives (with Jan Fook and Renate Klein, 2003)

September 11, 2001: Feminist Perspectives (with Bronwyn Winter, 2002)

Cyberfeminism: Connectivity, Critique and Creativity (with Renate Klein, 1999)

Car Maintenance, Explosives and Love and Other Lesbian Writings (with Cathie Dunsford and Susan Sayer, 1997)

Australia for Women: Travel and Culture (with Renate Klein, 1994)

Angels of Power and Other Reproductive Creations (with Renate Klein, 1991)

The Exploding Frangipani: Lesbian Writing from Australia and New Zealand (with Cathie Dunsford, 1990)

Moments of Desire: Sex and Sensuality by Australian Feminist Writers (with Jenny Pausacker, 1989)

Difference: Writings by Women (1985)

Bibliodiversity

A Manifesto for Independent Publishing

Susan Hawthorne



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I will go on adventuring, changing, opening my mind and
my eyes, refusing to be stamped and stereotyped.
The thing is to free one's self: to let it find dimensions,
not to be impeded.

—Virginia Woolf, *A Writer's Diary* (1953)

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Introduction

The new global publishing order is the latest in a series of mergers and takeovers in publishing that have occurred over the last century. While the church quickly commandeered printing for its own purposes in the fifteenth century, many books and pamphlets were published by the cottage industry that flourished around writers and thinkers. Women and members of colonised and enslaved peoples have always encountered obstacles to getting their ideas into print but, in spite of this, marginalised groups have found ways to air their words.

During the twentieth century, the book had spread all around the world, especially the paperback with its cheap paper and floppy cover. Allen Lane, the founder of Penguin, brought this into the public domain in the 1930s. Tuppence halfpenny a copy was all he asked. I remember the rows of orange Penguins, blue Pelicans and green crime novels in our bookshop in rural Australia. The black classics had not made it there and I'd already outgrown the Puffins, but the other popular colours filled the shelves.

In the twenty-first century, we are promised that 'digital' will save us: that rock-bottom-priced eBooks are the way to go, that we can publish our own words at the click of a mouse. But how true is this? Is this the first age of mass self-publishing? Does anyone need editors? And what role can independent publishers play in a marketing-driven global economy?

The market economy, in the guise of heavily capitalised megacorporations whose names are on the lips of every reader, promises to make it all happen. The process of publishing concentration has followed the same path as the industrialisation of other products. Both seek ever-increasing control over the people whom they claim to satisfy with their products. While 'big pharma' interferes with farming methods, 'big publishing' is forever distracting us with its latest product lines, great deals, books that cost almost nothing. But like the dairy farmer who sells her milk to the supermarket below cost, the publisher is expected to sell books that have taken years of nurturing, long editing, care with the look, feel and quality of the book, for just a couple of dollars.

Independent publishers (the definitions will come later) do not pump out new titles in a factory-style process. Chances are most of the people in the production are underpaid and underresourced but somehow they manage to produce the books anyway.

Global megacorp publishing does not encourage the quirky, the original, the risky, the inventive—the books that will become staples for the next generation because they have something new and relevant to say. Megacorp publishing is all about numbers, about sameness, about following a formula based on the latest megasuccess. Is it a J.K. Rowling lookalike story, a new erotic twist of 'seventy shades', or a twilight zone filled with zombie characters who walk like red-coated wooden soldiers? Big publishing and big bookselling with their big marketing will weed out anything different, flatten it, make it a one-size-fits-all cultural product. A line of books, like a line of lingerie. As André Schiffrin has written of the free marketplace of ideas, it "does not refer to the market value of each idea. On the contrary, what it means is that ideas of all sorts should have a chance to be put to the public, to be expressed and argued fully" (Schiffrin, 2001 cited in Wills, 2001). In megacorp publishing each book is expected to pay for itself and all the externalities of publishing such as offices and CEO salaries. It means that books which take off slowly but have long lives, the books that change social norms, are less likely to be published.

Independent publishers are seeking another way. A way of engagement with society and methods that reflect something important about the locale or the niche they inhabit. Independent and small publishers are like rare plants that pop up among the larger growth but add something different: they feed the soil, bring colour or scent into the world.

The International Alliance of Independent Publishers defines an 'independent publisher' as one who is not in receipt of funds or support, financial or in-kind, from institutions such as political parties, religious organisations or

universities, that gives them rights to make decisions on publishing. This definition does not prevent publishers from receiving grants, but the publishing program should be one that is not determined by the granting authority. Other elements of the Alliance's definition include the active participation in the running of the publishing house by those who provide the finance (e.g. it is not a short-term profit vehicle for a bank or corporation). Furthermore, that the list is one in which frontlist and backlist work in conjunction with one another. Independent publishers should ask themselves questions about their ability to promote bibliodiversity through public debate, working with independent booksellers, public libraries, and local organisations, as well as developing international partnerships with other independent publishers in producing co-editions and translations. The publishing of original work by authors is also an important element, in contrast to purchasing a sublicence for a mass-market book commodity.¹

Independent publishers are not hybrids, they are instead the source of cultural diversity. They bring bibliodiversity to face the humungous behemoth of megapublishing and bookselling. This manifesto walks the tightrope between long-term optimism and short-term pessimism. There are many challenges for independent publishers operating in the global marketplace and the advent of digital publishing opens new opportunities while simultaneously threatening a form of recolonisation of ideas and intellectual property. Writers, publishers, booksellers, librarians, readers and reviewers operate in a politically charged environment. Publishing is a social, cultural and transformative activity, but it is also one that can be appropriated by those who are not on the side of social justice and fair speech.

¹ The definition above is derived from a combination of discussions at meetings of the International Alliance of Independent Publishers, in particular with Spanish-language Co-ordinator, Juan Carlos Sáez, and Director, Laurence Hugues. See also Colleu (2006), pp. 94–97.