George Walkley- Interview Transcript

(Unedited)

Parul - LWS: [00:00:00] Welcome to the London Writers Salon podcast. I'm Parl. I'm your host, and I'm the co-founder of the London Writers Salon. And our salon interviews are chance for us to go behind the scenes with a creative, a writer, or a publishing professional that we admire. We bring them into the salon to explore the craft of writing, the art, of building a writing career, and some of the realities around the creative space.

Today our guest is George Walkley, and we will definitely be talking about some of the realities that we are all starting to become aware of around ai. But let me introduce George. George has 27 years of experience in the book business across book selling, publishing, consulting. He's held senior roles at Hashet today.

He's an independent consultant specializing in AI and the publishing industry. He's worked with the Independent Publishers Guild to build training on generative ai and has helped over 240 publishers. Over 10 countries, including the Big five. Also including [00:01:00] independent press, university presses, specialists.

And really I think what George brings here is a holistic view on the state of ai. He's also a writer. He has a newsletter which talks about the impact of AI as well. And really today's conversation is gonna be all about us just listening in to some of what George has access to the sort of conversations that are going on in the publishing industry.

Hopefully some of this will inform how we act in this space. So I've got some questions for George, but in around an hour or so, I shall open it up to you for any questions that you might have. So please do put your questions in the chat as they come. Without further ado, welcome the London right Salon on George

George Walkley: Perel.

Thank you very much indeed for having me. Good evening everyone. It's very nice to see people from around the world.

Parul - LWS: So George, we'll start with books because that's the one thing we all have in common in this room. We love books.

What kind of books do you read at the moment? Fiction, nonfiction?

George Walkley: Both. I'm probably skewed a [00:02:00] bit too much toward nonfiction. I read a lot a lot of that. And I read probably three or four novels a year. And every time I finish one, I think

I must read more, but a lot of what I'm reading is for research, things that I'm picking up. So there is a definite nonfiction skew.

Parul - LWS: **And in terms of some of the, have you got a favorite fiction novel?**

George Walkley: **Oh, all time. Favorite is the Great Gatsby. I just read Elizabeth Day's new book, which comes out in September in Proof Thanks to Harb Collins, which is spectacularly good. The follow up to the party. So that I really enjoyed.**

And way back at the very start of my publishing career, I worked in science fiction publishing and so that's always been an area that I've really enjoyed. Whenever I have time to read a novel, I often find myself gravitating back to toward sf.

Parul - LWS: **Love that. And now you've had some pretty senior roles and actually you spent a fair bit of [00:03:00] time in traditional publishing and corporate publishing.**

You were at he chef for a long time. What kind of role did you have there? What was your title?

George Walkley: **Well varied over the years I came. So the first eight years of my publishing career were actually in bookshops rather than a publisher. So by the time I came into publishing, I was, in my thirties I was I had that level of experience and I feel.**

A little bit like a fraud sometimes when I speak to people who came into publishing, and I'm aware actually that it can be a very difficult industry to get into. I circumvented some of that by coming in at a later stage with some experience from this adjacent sector. I do think, by the way, that it's a really great thing to work in book selling because if nothing else, it gives you a really strong sense of what readers are looking for.

I have friends who are publishers and friends who are authors who've spent time in bookshops, and it's something that's really useful to all of us. So I came into publishing originally as a marketing manager. I was [00:04:00] then marketing director. Of Little Brown in London and Director of Digital Strategy at Little Brown.

In 2009. I went to Ashe, the parent company, where I helped to set up their digital business. I was head of digital there and laterally I was group development director at Ette. So looking after our digital business, working with the CEO and board on strategy and mergers and acquisitions.

Parul - LWS: **Now there are many careers you could have chosen, but you've decided to move into from, even from book selling days, you've decided books and publishing.**

What is it about this industry that has always fascinated you?

George Walkley: **I think there's two answers to that question. The long run answer is one of the first sounds that I can remember from childhood is the sound of an Olivetti manual typewriter. My mother was a, his is a historian has written half a dozen books and combined that [00:05:00] with raising a family.**

And so early in the morning, one of the sounds that I remember is the sound of that typewriter before the rest of the household woke up. So books had been a part of my life. There were always

books around, I guess that normalized the idea of books and publishing as a career For me, getting into it. In reality was a little bit more sort of circumstantial.

I, I left university without a very clear idea of what to do. And my local bookshop was hiring. And it was quite strongly suggested to me that getting a job, any job would be a good idea. And what was originally intended to be a few months at bookshop as a seasonal thing turned into that eight years and a lot of really useful experience.

Parul - LWS: So interesting. I love the idea that was your fir one of your first sounds. And why did you leave? 'cause you're now an independent consultant and we'll be talking a lot about the area that you now specialize in AI and publishing. Yeah. But why did you originally leave?

George Walkley: Very [00:06:00] candidly, I so flashback to late 2019, early 2020 before the pandemic.

I had been commuting something like 20 hours a week, every week for 15 years. I was quite tired, I was quite burned out and it felt like time for a change. At the time that I was making those decisions. I don't think any of us really. Understood what the pandemic was going to be like, how much that would reshape things.

If I had been able to do everything remotely on Zoom as my colleagues went on to do very successfully, would that have changed things? Possibly. But I certainly think it was true that I had been at Ash, she for a long time. When you've been in the business for a while, that there are definitely things that are cyclical.

You see the same decisions coming round sometimes with a slightly different face to them, sometimes with a different set of stakeholders involved, but it was definitely, I could see things coming round that I'd seen before. [00:07:00] And one of the things that really appeals to me about my life now is the learning rate.

So I have become a middle-aged cliche in having a sort of portfolio career. I do my consulting work, I'm involved with a couple of businesses as a non-executive director, and. The downside of it is that you don't have the security of a salary, but the upside is that you can work with really interesting and varied people.

Up to 2020, I had this, I had a decent amount of experience in consumer that is trade publishing, but there were whole areas of the business that I'd just never been exposed to through my consulting and training workers you hinted at, I now work with trade publishers, university presses, children's publishing, art publishing, legal publishing.

There are all of these bits of the industry that you don't necessarily see from one perspective, and I can now see a little bit of each of them and learn from them. And [00:08:00] so that's been an enormously attractive thing for me.

Parul - LWS: Yeah, and that's where you're now uniquely positioned as you have this overview.

As a consultant of the publishing industry and how they're thinking about the new frontier that many of us are worried about. And maybe if anyone's like me, just a little bit, maybe green around the topic. And so I'm approaching this interview as a newbie, relative, newbie. There's so much

about AI that I'd like to understand better, really starting from the basics about what I should know about it and where I need to take responsibility where I need to be cautious.

So I'm gonna start with a really basic question, which is, what is ai? What are the parameters for what it is and what it isn't?

George Walkley: I think that's a really smart place to start, because what's quite clear to me is that. AI is a very broad set of technologies, and it's sometimes broader than we give it credit for.

Occasionally I'll talk to a publisher or an author or someone else in the business and they'll say, oh, I'm very pro ai, or I'm very [00:09:00] anti ai, and that feels like a really broad statement to me. Let's start by narrowing it down a little bit. AI is really. Any technology that replaces something that traditionally required a human input.

Now, I've deliberately defined that very broadly. The self scan checkout at your supermarket is a form of ai. Your doctor probably uses AI as a diagnostic support. If you're a published writer and your books are sitting in an Amazon warehouse somewhere, there's a robot that's putting your book in a box on its way to a reader.

And that's a form of AI too. And then the other end of the spectrum, we have these, these applications, large language models like chat, GPT, which are, what most authors and publishers are most concerned about because they are designed to replicate. Patterns of human language.

They're designed to create something that is generative and new. [00:10:00] So first thing you can say that you are anti ai. I completely respect that. There's a range of opinions on this issue. Not everyone on the call this evening may agree with everything that I say, but it's much broader than just Sage Chat, GPT.

Parul - LWS: Yeah. That's such, that's really interesting. I realize I did not have that definition. And how long has this been around for, broadly speaking, the technology?

George Walkley: This is another really interesting one because AI, as a set of technologies has existed for a long time. We can go back to the aftermath of the Second World War.

We can look at research in the 1950s and sixties on AI and machine learning and ways that machines can learn patterns over time and get better at that at that kind of pattern recognition. But the AI that we've had for most of that time has been simultaneously advanced and limited.

It's kept getting better. There are these sort of big moments that [00:11:00] many of us may remember. For me Gary Ovs chess matches against the IBM AI are a really big seminal moment in this, but. These are ais that are not particularly accessible. The average person who is not a computer scientist is not going to be able to go and play with them.

By the way, just to set out my lack of credentials at the beginning of this I'm not a computer scientist by background. I'm a historian originally. I'm not someone who would've been able to go and look at machine learning in 2015 or 2016 in a particularly meaningful way. The big date that everyone should keep in mind is November of 2022, almost three years ago, and that's the moment that chat GPT is released into the world.

I think it's a watershed moment because that's the point at which the average non-specialist person can go and have a go at something that's [00:12:00] quite user-friendly. And instantly we see this explosion, in fewer than a hundred fewer than 90 days. It gets a hundred million users. I think at l last count, something like 18% of the planetary population has used that tool.

So it just explodes. But it's that accessibility that I think makes it so significant.

Parul - LWS: I'm learning so much. I didn't think about 2022. I'm thinking about more recent news. So I've had various takes on AI directly from people who are in the publishing industry or connected within the publishing industry.

And this week I spoke to a nonfiction writer who is telling me that his editors are definitely pro AI now making that point to him. I'd love for you to just, maybe give your take on what you think the mood is in the publishing industry towards AI at this point.

George Walkley: Profoundly mixed. First of all, define ai.

What we are [00:13:00] really talking about here is large language models and associated tools. Second thing define publishing. Very broad stroke observation. But I would say that academic and specialist publishing tends to be more comfortable with the technology. Those are often more digitally mature businesses.

They're much better at running channel strategies for their content. Some of them have been using AI in different forms for a decade already. So generally speaking, there's a level of comfort there in consumer that is trade publishing. On the other hand, I would say there's. A much higher level of concern from publishers, from agents, from authors, really from each stage of the value chain.

And that concern is number one, has existing content been used in particular ways to train these models? Has that content been used in a way that didn't have credit, didn't have permission, didn't have [00:14:00] compensation? Yeah. The answer there straightforwardly is yes to all of those things. There is no doubt that copyrighted material has been used to train LLMs without any consent.

And that's a huge issue, which I'm sure we're going to come back to later in the conversation. Beyond that, the secondary issue that a lot of people are very worried about is what's the impact of this on my career, my skill base, my own writing? Interestingly earlier this summer, the bookseller, the the main trade magazine in the UK ran a piece of research, on attitudes to ai. Now let's stipulate that it's fewer than a hundred respondents. It's not a massive survey, and it's picking up on a population of something like 38,000 in the UK alone, just for publishers. If we get into authors, it's even bigger. So it's a small number of respondents against a big population.

But if we accept that it's directionally interesting then we [00:15:00] see the, the majority of people are deeply concerned about this. There's a sort of small segment that of perhaps 18% that is excited now. Here's the interesting thing. Earlier in the year, there was a much bigger study done of Latin American publishers by an organization called Ecto 4 5 1, and was published in PW.

On that research, the proportions were almost exactly reversed. The majority over 50%, very excited, and only about 20% or so, anxious about it. Now, the same factors in terms of copyright hold true for those Latin American publishers that hold true for English language publishers in London. And yet the proportions are exactly reversed.

Why is that? I think there's a bunch of answers to that and we can probably get into some of them in the conversation, but what I would say is there is every reason for people to be cautious and to want to understand this. [00:16:00] There are big legal questions, which I'm sure we're going to get into in the conversation, but at the same time, I think the.

The tone of the discourse on AI and publishing is very negative. At London Book Fair this year, I was taken to one side by an author who said, in a slightly Monty Python Finnish way, what has AI ever actually done through authors and publishers. And so I went through a list of things that I've seen over the last couple of years and at the end of it, the author said it's funny 'cause I didn't know about any of those.

A lot of publishers, because they're concerned about author sentiment, aren't always having honest and candid conversations about this. And that sort of just leaves this sort of gap that's filled by speculation. Now, I may not necessarily change your mind on ai. You may be deeply concerned about it, and if so, that's a point of view.

I completely respect, but. Let's try and start with a rounded picture of where it's being used, and then from there you can [00:17:00] make up your mind in an informed way.

Parul - LWS: And maybe we go to that. I'm, 'cause when you say that publishers have been using a AI and it's been helpful for a while. I'm trying to think.

Are we talking about production? Are we talking about data like Nielsen data and

George Walkley: Sure. Okay. Let's think about, let's think about the life cycle of a book. And actually if we break that down, at almost every stage of the process we see examples of AI being used. So number one, let's start with the original Creative Act.

An author coming up with a piece of work for good or for Ill, we know that there are people using AI there. I think it was about five or six weeks ago that there was a big furor on TikTok when it turned out that several romance authors had left AI prompts within the finished book. So as people were reading this particular book, there was an obvious chat GPT output that referred to prompts and referred to what the user had asked for.

Yes, of course I can write a [00:18:00] paragraph in the style of this other author. Here it is. And they left that in. Now those authors are not alone. The journal nature has found hundreds of academic articles where there are similar. LLM artifacts within them. So these are

Parul - LWS: all recent though, 'cause obviously this is, this technology has not been available.

George Walkley: Now these are all super recent. These are all in recent years. In fact, I think probably the most egregious example is a really serious academic oncology textbook, which, for heaven's sake of all things you would wish that was properly written and edited. And in the first chapter of that book, there is a plump left in there that makes clear that AI had been used to write and that no one had edited, seen that, or edited it out.

So first point, it's being used very broadly for writing. We can debate the rights or wrongs of that. I'm sure everyone on the call will have a view on it. Second of all within the publisher, think about the process of appraising a book, making a [00:19:00] decision on whether to publish it. Working

with a manuscript that's come into Polish it for publication the nuts and bolts process of preparing A PDF and an ebook file and an audiobook AI can help with all of that.

Parul - LWS: Sorry, my actual original question was, has it been used in the past? But you are actually, all the examples so far are in the present. So am I right in thinking this is only recently where it's not been? Thank you for

George Walkley: clarifying that. Yeah. This is re this is recent developments. Absolutely. We see.

Okay. I think where it's been used longest where we go back prior to chat, GPT is people using it for data. One of the things that you just referred to there is a huge amount of information out there. Sales information, Nielsen data, Amazon data publishers can sometimes struggle to make sense of that.

And for many years they've looked at AI tools as a way of doing that. And the last few years has really kickstarted that process of using it for [00:20:00] sales marketing and data analysis. And then the final part of this, if we think about our journey from the writer to the reader, the final part of this is what are readers doing?

And all of the evidence is that in recent years, readers are using AI as well. The copyright licensing agency did some good research this year that found that 82% of professional AI users in the UK were taking third party content and uploading it to an AI model as part of their prompt. You are talking about a book at your reading group cut and paste something in and say, give me a couple of talking points on this.

Or like my youngest daughter, a few months ago, you are doing your maths homework and you are struggling. So you take a photograph of the textbook page and upload that for an explanation. So really at every single stage of the process, there are AI uses. Some of them may concern us, things like perhaps the more [00:21:00] creative applications.

Some of them are more straightforwardly positive. Actually being able to work with that massive data, being able to sell books more effectively is what every publisher would like to do to look after their bottom line. Ultimately, it's what every author would like because they'd like healthy sales as well.

And AI can be enormously helpful there.

Parul - LWS: Yeah, definitely if AI can help sell books, that feels much, much easier to digest than the big issue that has caused so much upset around the world is this issue around meta using lib gen to train its ai. And I wonder if we just go back to this idea, 'cause I had a friend who works in publishing in the rights department who asked me, what is lip gen?

I was surprised that she hadn't heard of it. And I thought, that's interesting. I assume that everyone in publishing would be thinking about it all the time. And so maybe we just dive a little bit into this and I, this is a very. Contentious topic. We don't have the answers for this, but I would love to just be a little bit more informed.

Sure. So I wonder if we can talk a little bit about [00:22:00] what Lib Gen is for anyone who doesn't know. My understanding is it started as a project to help students access academic papers behind closed walls.

George Walkley: Absolutely. Let's start with just a really foundational thing that'll help everyone, which is that AI learns through training data and there are three kinds of training data and it's worth us understanding all of them.

So traditional AI applications worked on the basis of something called supervised learning. Supervised learning is where you have a structured data set. Elsevier for example, might take several tens of thousands of academic papers that they've published. Those have got a structure, they've got metadata.

Elsevier can give those to an AI developer and say now write me an AI that will look at which papers someone has read and recommend the next thing that they should read after that. That's the kind of AI use that was being done in 2012 or 2015 and [00:23:00] it's incredibly helpful. The second kind of learning is unsupervised learning.

And this is really what underpins track, GPT and other large language models. Here. We are not taking a defined and limited data set. We're taking pretty much all of the data we can lay hands on. That might be books that have been digitized, it might be archives, it might be social media posts, emails web content all of Reddit and all of Wikipedia.

And we're handing all of that to a model. And instead of giving it a specific task, like recommended journal article, we are saying. Understand the patterns of language and be ready to generate new language based on a prompt from a user. So it's much, much more broad based, but it depends on access to a ton of content, which is where we're gonna come to in a second.

And the third type of learning is something called reinforcement learning. And this is the most human of all of them. It's something we've all [00:24:00] done. We learn from interaction with our environment. If a small child touches a hot radiator, they learn that it's a bad idea to touch hot radiators, and hopefully they don't do it again.

So in the same way, when you give something to an ai, when you upload a document, when you give it a prompt, it learns from that interaction with you. Now for this reason, a lot of people are very cautious about what they put into AI models, and they're absolutely right to be. And we can maybe touch on that in a moment.

With all of this in mind, if you are running a big AI company, you need as much data as you can to build a really robust model that is capable of answering almost anything the user throws at it. So where are you gonna get that from? You are going to look online, you are going to look at publicly available data, but if there's information in the world's books that you want access to, how do you get access to it?

And the answer is something called Shadow Libraries. [00:25:00] And Lib Gen is an example of a shadow library Now. This does, as you suggested, peril go back to scholarship. Originally, a lot of the big shadow libraries in the world emerged in the former Soviet Union in the 1990s and the early two thousands, and they were part of a, an intellectual tradition that went back to the Cold War.

During the Cold War, Russian researchers passed on what was called samizdat or copies of research that wasn't accessible to them, but which they circulated amongst themselves so they could keep up to date with knowledge that wasn't formally accessible to them. And with the emergence of the internet, what has happened is we have these large collections of.

Books, journal articles, other content sources, and in many cases they are, they're huge. They dwarf traditional collections. And the AI companies realized [00:26:00] that though these collections books were not legally acquired, there was a huge amount of information there that they could go and look at. Now, meta and lib gen is absolutely in mind at the moment because it's the most recent and probably the most egregious of these examples, but a couple of points to make.

Number one, lib gen is not the only shadow library that's out there. For example, there's also a large collection of stolen infringing eBooks called Books Three, which has been used very extensively for AI training. Second point to make. It's not just meta. Practically every major technology company has accessed these kinds of archives to get information as training data.

And this is now at the center of litigation around the world with copyright holders suing those AI [00:27:00] companies over their decision to do that.

Parul - LWS: So they're currently 16, from what I read online, there were 16 copyright cases and maybe there are more around generative AI tools. Now this is all massively depressing, I'll be honest.

It just makes me feel so sad. That and there's obviously, there's so many, there's nuance to this, and this is, there are wider issues happening around this. Obviously it's really hard because we're in the room with writers all the time. We see how hard they work at their craft and, but someone to just take their work or any writer from any time.

So I'm gonna ask you, and maybe I'll ask for a moment. At this point in time, what is being done to? Who's rep who I believe the author's Guild a part of this fight. Fight. Who else is engaged in this on behalf of writers?

George Walkley: It's a great question. The authors Guild are absolutely involved in this.

So authors, advocacy groups, individual authors themselves. There are some very prominent authors in America who have joined litigation. And even indeed, some [00:28:00] publishers are suing the AI companies over their behavior. I think it's helpful even if we do not agree with it or. Believe in it.

It's helpful to understand the AI company's perspective here because what we've seen in the last few weeks is quite nuanced judgments by courts on this issue. And it shows that authors are not necessarily going to get an easy ride in these legal cases, even if public sentiment is with them. So it's worth understanding the contra position so that we can improve our own.

Copyright has always existed to provide a balance between the needs of the creator of a work. And the needs of society. There are all kinds of limitations to copyright, which are part of the social contract. So for instance, we accept that once a book, once an author has been dead long enough, life of the author, plus 70 years, in most [00:29:00] jurisdictions, the work goes into the public domain.

Jane Austen's descendants, if they're traceable, have benefited enough from her work and the it should be part of the commons. So there's always been that idea of a limit. Similarly, there are

established exceptions to copyright for the purpose of scholarship or for the purpose of accessibility. So we've always accepted this idea of balance.

Now the AI companies will turn around and say that what they are doing is not unlawful. Their argument is that if I write a book and they put it into their AI system, they are not trying to take away the market for my work. They're not trying to compete with me, they're not trying to make my book available.

All they are interested in is the underlying patterns of language that you see in my book. And my book is an infinitesimally small part of a very [00:30:00] large hole. In the same way that if you've used a free email service in the last 10 years, the emails you've written are probably part of the training data for an AI model.

If you've posted on social media platforms, if you've made. A contribution to Wikipedia. Again, those things will be part of the training data. And so the AI companies say, we're not trying to take away from any of that. We're simply trying to enable people to create new things. And their argument is that is good for society because society as a whole now has access to this wonderful new tool that can be used for things.

Now, what will this actually come down to? It'll come down to two things, time and money. Number one, legal cases of this sort take a very long time to resolve. Some people on the call may remember that at a much earlier stage of the web and [00:31:00] digital media, Google was scanning books in the world's libraries and making them available.

Parul - LWS: I remember this. Yeah, there was a huge controversy there. Yeah.

George Walkley: The authors Guild and some of the major publishers sued Google.

Parul - LWS: I remember,

George Walkley: I will just say that case occupied the first two thirds of the 15 years I spent at Ashe. Initially just watching it from the sidelines as it went on. Later on, I was involved in meetings and discussion about it, but it took 10 years to get to any kind of resolution on the issue because there were cases and decisions and appeals, and counter appeals, and it takes a very long time.

And generally speaking, whoever has the deepest pocket has a little bit of an advantage going into this. So I don't think that the legal cases are going to be sorted out anytime soon.

Parul - LWS: But you said that there were some nuanced judgments coming through. Yeah. Or were they smaller cases?

George Walkley: So these were early [00:32:00] judgments, and it's important to say that they're almost certainly going to be appealed to circuit court level.

They may very well end up in front of the Supreme Court in the United States, and that's a long run process that doesn't get resolved quickly. As a general rule, the decisions were interesting because we had two decisions on behalf of authors in the last few weeks. One was a legal case involving Anthropic and AI company, and the other involved meta.

And if I can try and summarize quite complicated judgments, quite straightforwardly, the anthropic judgment found that the use of authors work. To train models was fair use and permissible under copyright law. But the way that the books had been obtained in the first place may have been a violation of copyright law.

And so the judge has ordered that there is a separate hearing to determine damages. So [00:33:00] that's the first, that's the sort of the first part of this. And there's ongoing discussion. There are appeals today. In fact, a judge has allowed a class action to proceed against philanthropics. So that was the first judgment.

The second judgment was authors suing meta. And here the judge basically went out of his way to say meta. Is going to get away with it for now because the authors didn't make a strong enough argument. And if I were the authors, this is the argument that I would've rung. So interesting. It was a case of the judge giving the clearest possible sense that there is a better argument that could have been made.

Parul - LWS: And what is that broader argument that is, might be successful?

George Walkley: So it's really coming down to questions of market harm. The judge in the meta case was arguing that large language [00:34:00] models do not learn like human beings. They learn on a much larger scale with fewer limits. And it would be theoretically possible for the market for books on a particular subject to be completely flooded by AI generated work.

Now, that's a very novel theory of harm. The fact that the judge is actually suggesting that rather than a lawyer suggesting that indicates that we are. I'm not a lawyer, but my understanding is this is the leading edge really of legal argument on this topic. So I think what is really clear is that there are going to be months or years of back and forth, there will be months or years of back and forth in the courts.

What's happening in the meantime is that a lot of the AI companies are trying to. Get out of this with their checkbooks rather than taking material from authors, they're trying to license it. So for instance, last year, [00:35:00] hop Collins, one of the big trade publishers, went out to their authors and said, there is a deal on the table with a tech platform.

We now know that is Microsoft. They didn't say at the time, but for each work that is used, there's $6,000 on the table and we're proposing to take half of that 6,000, and we're gonna give the other half to the author. So from an author's point of view, there's $3,000 of easy money for a short term time limited deal for specific usages.

Do you want to opt in or do you want to opt out? And we don't know the exact numbers because it's sensitive data, but I think the broad understanding is that some authors were very opposed to that and opted out. Some authors were very glad to have a new revenue stream opted in and made a decent amount of money from it.

So going forward, if I'm running an AI company, my best strategy is finding these kinds of licensing deals and finding a way of working with authors and publishers. [00:36:00] And almost every week that goes by, we see publishers doing, another publisher doing a deal with an AI platform that returns money to authors.

Parul - LWS: That's really, yeah. So interesting to hear the nuance of this all and the ongoing debate makes me think of a very long match that might go on for years and years. Yeah. What's the general sentiment? Maybe from you were the publishers of that financial deal being made, was there a relief, was there some sense of it's not enough?

Was there confusion around does one author get more than the other?

George Walkley: Again, again, define your publisher. You are going to look at this very differently if you are Harper Collins versus if you are John Wiley. As many people on the call will know there are big differences between academic and trade publishing contracts.

In a trade publishing contract, the author via their agent tends to reserve more power and more rights. In an academic publishing contract, it's much more normal for the [00:37:00] author to give away more to the publisher. And so in that context, the publisher may not even have to ask, they may just be able to go right ahead.

There's, there are different views according to which bit of publishing you look at. There are probably different views according to sizes of publisher. If you are a much larger publisher, you can strike a much harder deal with the AI platform. If you are a smaller publisher, there is probably less money on offer.

So it's it's about actually looking at each deal on its individual merits, asking good, sensible questions about it. This is where if you're an agent at author, your agent absolutely ought to be leaning into the questions that are asked of your publisher about the term of this. Am I giving away?

Where am I working in perpetuity? Or is it through a limited period of time?

Parul - LWS: And this is within the a And so this is within the contra, the license for a, for i ai.

George Walkley: This is within a, this is within a an AI licensing deal. What am I giving away my work for? Is this to train a new model that [00:38:00] could theoretically compete with my work, or is it for fact checking and building a database?

Is there any way that a verbatim ex excerpt of my work could appear as part of an output? Or is it genuinely just the underlying pattern of language? So there are some really nuanced questions that I think authors can, authors and their representatives can ask to weigh up whether a particular deal is a good one.

Now, building on that point, and I think anticipating something you are asking even before you get to a licensing deal, there are big questions about the kind of contracts you might sign with a publisher. Every publisher that I know is putting AI wording into their contracts with authors. So for example, they want to know.

Did you use AI to write this book? What tools did you use? To what extent, how much they want to know that and they may want to impose restrictions. Now, I think if a publisher wants to [00:39:00] know how an author has used ai, it is only fair and reasonable that the author knows how the publisher is going to use it.

So again, every agent that I know is trying to put wording into new contracts to govern how a particular work can be used with ai. And my, my really clear sense here is contracts work best when there is transparency, when there is a clarity of expectation, and when both sides go into something with their eyes open.

So let me say something. Slightly controversial. Two weeks ago, there was an open letter in the liter on the literary website Lit Hub. I believe 60 or 70 authors signed it initially. Last time I checked, I think they were up to several thousand signatories to this open letter, and it was addressed to the big five trade publishers in America.

And it was demanding that they basically reside from all use of ai. That they don't use it, that they don't use [00:40:00] it for internal processes, that they don't replace tasks with it, et cetera, et cetera. Now, I totally understand the sentiment behind that open letter. I understand why authors feel that way, and I have enormous sympathy with them.

The reality is that's an impossible letter for any of those publishers to agree with because all of them are using AI already in some ways that. Might benefit authors, the publishers are not going to allow an open letter to bind their decision making. And the other element of this, which is really interesting, is one of the biggest pioneers in AI in book selling and publishing at the moment is, of course Amazon.

And Amazon is all in on ai.

Parul - LWS: So I was about to ask about self-published writers.

George Walkley: Yeah. So Amazon is using AI completely across the board. Now I don't work directly with Amazon anymore, and I'm not basing this on any [00:41:00] privileged or confidential information, but it is my good faith belief. That it would be impossible to list a book on Amazon today in a way that guaranteed it wouldn't be used with AI because whatever is uploaded to Amazon, Amazon is using that as training data.

They're using it to do things like improve listing pages for books, makes suggestions for metadata, makes smarter recommendations, all things that ought to benefit an author. But if you are going to turn around like those lit hub authors and say, we don't want any AI at all, that's fine. That's a totally principled position, but you should really not be using Amazon at that point.

Now, for some people that may be a decision that they have the privilege of being able to make for most authors, particularly early career authors saying, I'm not gonna work with Amazon is a really tough ask. So I think we need to be really clear [00:42:00] that contracts. Verbal understandings between authors and publishers.

Any of the agreements we make as part of this ecosystem have to be based on a level of pragmatic reality, as hard as that is.

Parul - LWS: Yeah. Really interesting. And I dunno why I didn't realize that actually, that of course a lot of these technology companies that we're on will be taking in information and using that to maybe serve up other information, whether it's a book or another ad. Absolute. So that makes sense. And yeah.

And so one of our members just on top of licensing and also this idea that publishers have. Sorry, my internet might be a bit unstable there. The idea that publishers might be asking authors to, to be clear about what tools they've used, one of our members has set up a company called Cred 10. And the way it's described is it enables ethical AI through content [00:43:00] licensing for ai corpus compliance and certified content credibility.

I'm curious where you are seeing other initiatives like this in the publishing space to combat the issue of ification and credibility.

George Walkley: Look, this is a huge question for everyone involved in the landscape, and it's a question that retailers and others are asking very hard. In the last two years, Amazon, the wholesaler Ingram and the ethical bookseller bookshop.org are all examples of platforms that have asked publishers to declare whether particular books were written by a human being.

Were written by an ai, or were some combination of those two things. And I think your member company sounds really interesting. There are some parallel developments. The Author's Guild, for example, is running its own program to certify certain books as human created. The underlying idea there is absolutely first class.[00:44:00]

As a consumer, I want to know what I'm getting. If I buy food stuffs, I can look at a list of ingredients and see what is in there and have faith in it. And in the same way I should have faith in the book that I'm buying. Problem is compliance. How do we know? A lot of the very good, well-intentioned activity in this space is based on people voluntarily declaring, no, I did it this way, or I did it that way.

Now let's stipulate that the majority of authors are gonna be honest, of course. But if you are determined to be dishonest, like those romance authors I mentioned earlier who left their chat, GPT plots in the finished ebook, if you are one of those people, you are just going to lie and you are probably going to get away with it.

It is very hard to detect ai. Most of us, I think, probably think we could have a go at it. I'm sure anyone who cares seriously about the craft of writing will feel that they can spot [00:45:00] where an LLM has been used. But this is an area that schools and universities are way ahead of publishers here because they are dealing with a generation that is just using AI for everything.

And the software that they're using to try and catch AI cheats is quite unreliable. To give you a sense of this, I took a chapter of my own work in progress manuscript, which had started as handwriting and been typed up by me. I put that into the two most popular AI detection tools that are freely available.

The first of them said that there was a 3% chance that this was AI and a 97% chance that it was written by a human being. In other words, that was quite accurate. The second tool that I put my own work into told me that there was a 90% probability that I had used AI and that it wasn't human [00:46:00] written.

So the point I make here is just that the tools aren't very good at spotting this, and we are all going to have to get used to the idea that. If someone is determined to use ai, they will probably get away with it. It's an arms race between creation and detection, and in that scenario, creation and creativity is probably going to win.

So in other words, we've, we can rely on human transparency and honesty. We can rely on flawed software that may get things completely wrong. I think in a way, we just have to accept that there'll be a lot of quite bad quality writing out there. I'm gonna say something again, slightly controversial. I remain very optimistic about human beings and writers and creativity because I don't think that what chat GPT does is writing in a way that I recognize the term [00:47:00] writing.

To me, writing is an embodied thought process. It is a process of trying things and scratching them out and starting again and rephrasing and paraphrasing and coming back to something weeks or months later and having another go at it. And there's this constant process of learning and shaping. And I don't think that's what a, a large language model does.

A large language model, as many of you will know, is fundamentally based on probability. There's a really big database of everything that model has seen in the past, and when you ask a question of it, it's going to give you not the right answer, not the truthful or ethical answer, not even the best written answer.

It is going to give you what it believes is the most probable response based on what it's seen in the past. First point is that probabilities can, there's always the possibility of a long shot. [00:48:00] Something can just go wrong. Second thing, it's fundamentally guided by what it has seen before. It is conservative and backward looking.

Think about two examples. We're in 2025. Think about 1925. If I ask a large language model to write a classic, I don't know, golden age, locked room, murder mystery, it can probably take a decent run at doing that because it's read everything that Dashel Hamilton, DOROT Hill says. An Agatha Christie ever wrote.

What's going to come out is probably quite derivative, but it will be true to the tropes and to the form. On the other hand, think about something else published in 1925. Think about Joyce's Ulysses. Think about a novel that is completely new, not only in character and narrative, but in form and function.

I simply don't believe that an [00:49:00] AI at the moment is capable of that kind of imaginative leap. Similarly, I I don't think that an AI is capable of creating a new artistic style. I think that an AI can replicate Studio Ghibli because it's seen a million gifts that have been ripped from Studio Ghibli movies.

I don't think it could create a completely new aesthetic style. A friend of mine is this lovely encapsulation. AI is about probability, human beings are about possibility. And so for that reason I'm fundamentally optimistic that human creative work continues to stand out.

Parul - LWS: That's like a beautiful tonic to hear. I think. I think, and I'm hearing this more and more when I talk to people who are thinking about this space, I'm hearing that possibility emerge, that belief in the human ingenuity and the belief in [00:50:00] what we are able to create and connect. We interviewed a lovely writer called Margaret Heffernan not too long ago.

She talks about embracing uncertainty, and when she talked about ai, she talked about Margaret Atwood and how the way Margaret Atwood had over the years started to make clippings of extreme positions in the church, abortion rates or views towards abortion, falling birth rate. And then how this over a long period of time came together to create the Handmaid's Tale.

So I, I find that, and I find this hugely heartening, i'd just a few more questions on the impact of AI that I guess 'cause where I'm coming to from this is I'm trying to like search for what should we know about that we don't know about in this space? And one of those topics is around the environmental impacts of ai.

Yeah. I wonder if you can talk, and I know I believe you talk about this a lot to, when you give a talk to a publisher, you're talking about this, what are they and how might we, if at all. [00:51:00] **Do something about this.**

George Walkley: **Sure. Okay, so the environmental impact of AI is really controversial and there is fierce argument back and forth on this.**

Let's start with what is absolutely undisputed. There are three categories of energy usage and resource consumption that go hand in hand with ai. The first of all, you need to assemble data and train a model that has an impact. Second of all, you need an infrastructure that is lots of data centers all the way around the world so that when one of us puts a res, puts a prompt into to track GPT, we get a prompt reply back from the model.

And then the third thing and by the way, those data centers need to be running 24 7, 3 6 5, whether or not we're asking questions. And then finally, when we actually ask a question, it goes to a server in a data center, and there is an energy and water usage associated with [00:52:00] **that. Number one, these the servers that run these applications run very advanced processes, GPUs, which underpin all of the complex math and probability that's going on in the background that requires a lot of electricity.**

First. Second of all, those things get hot. Like really hot. And there is a really significant usage of water, very often fresh, potable water to cool chips in data centers. Now the question is how big of an issue is this? And this is all really a question of perspective and how we think about this.

Sam Altman, who runs open AI, has a very strong incentive to say that there's nothing to see here and we should all move on. And he has just claimed that AI is far more efficient than anyone had given it credit for. At the same time, I asked myself, if that is true, [00:53:00] **then why aren't you publishing detailed environmental data to back that up?**

I'm suspicious there. But what's also clear is that every other choice we make as writers and as consumers has an environmental impact. Peril, your video has frozen. Can I just pause and check that audio and video are coming through clearly in case there's a problem?

Parul - LWS: **Yeah. Thanks for checking it.**

It looks like, yeah, I'm not entirely sure why I'm having some issues. I, you're frozen for me for a second, but it sounds you are coming through

George Walkley: **George. Okay, good. Thank you. The reality is, and everything has an impact. How many people on the call have watched an hour of streaming television on the last, in the last week?**

Netflix, Amazon Prime BBCI players, something like that, I suspect most of us have now, depending on whose estimate you take, that hour of streaming television was [00:54:00] **either 30 to 40 prompts**

or 250 to 300 prompts. Everything has an impact. Those Netflix shows have got data centers that have exactly the same power and water draw as the AI model.

In fact, the best encapsulation of this I saw is that if you really care about the planet the most. Effective thing you can do is probably having a plant-based diet. The average American eating beef for a year is responsible for about half a million liters of water usage to raise that beef. And that's a lot of, that's a lot of resource that's been taken.

So this sounds like a slightly cutesy argument and I don't want it to, we all make choices. I've just seen someone in the chat say, I trust Sam Altman. I would trust a badger not to rip my face in the wild. And Nelly, I think, yeah, I think that's extremely good and funny and [00:55:00] trenchant because of how true it is, the reality is we all make choices.

If you are going to put a print book out into the world, congratulations. There's an energy usage. There are truck miles as your book goes to Amazon distribution centers around the world. Most of us as authors have come to terms with that, and I think what most of us will believe is that reading has benefits in terms of literacy and knowledge, and that those outweigh the environmental impact of our one book.

But that's the kind of trade off we need to think about here. What I say to publishers is, number one, be aware that this is an issue, and be aware that it's going to be very hard for you to quantify your own impact accurately because the AI companies are not making that easy for you. Number two, if you decide you are going to use ai, there are some things that you can do practically use AI for meaningful things.

Don't use it for [00:56:00] trivia. Use the right AI model. If you use a really complex reasoning model to answer a really straightforward question about metadata for a book, that's a case of overkill. It's using more energy than it needs to do that. So fit the right task to the right model. So you are using it very efficiently.

And then think just generally and holistically about your other usage. If you are going to use ai, it's very difficult to quantify and offset, but it may be that there are other areas of your business where it's easier to see an impact and offset it. So there are no easy or glib answers here, I'm afraid.

We are all, we're all, 6 billion people on a rapidly heating planet in a late capitalist society. We're all making decisions about our own footprint and that's, I think, where I come out with ai.

Parul - LWS: Thank you. It's [00:57:00] definitely illuminating to think about it that way. And maybe if I take it down to the individual LA layer so I can understand publishers making those choices, individuals, some of these choices might apply to us too.

And I dunno if there, there is a real answer to this, but you just, the fact some learning language models are, it can be more intensive. More complex. Does this apply to the different options that are out there? So Claude and Chat, GPT Gemini, should we be thinking about which model to use for which type of subject?

George Walkley: That's a really, it's a really interesting one. I use them all really intensively because I have different clients that have chosen different models. The reality is, in terms of their

performance, most of them are much of a muchness in terms of their energy usage and the quality of the responses. A lot of this really comes down to individual preference.

Claude, I think is slightly better at data analysis and coding chat. GPT is very slightly better at writing, in my [00:58:00] opinion. Gemini is very useful if you've got a lot of data in Google tools and services that you want to work with, but they're all fairly interchangeable. The interesting thing I think, is that there are a couple of outliers.

So earlier this year, there was a big moment when a Chinese company called Deep Seeq released its first model, and one of the claims that was made about deep Seeq is that it was 99% more efficient than chat GPT. It used less energy, it was faster, and therefore that underpinned it being cheap or free.

Now, as with everything else in life, there are trade-offs. There are no easy answers. Yes. On the face of it, if you believe the numbers, it looks a lot more efficient. Go back to Nelly's comment about Sam Altman. Do you trust a Chinese AI company more or less than you trust Sam Aman? That's a personal decision for all of us.

It's very clear, for example, [00:59:00] that the company behind Deep Seek has close links to the Chinese government. It's very clear that there are certain topics that are off limits for that model. If you ask for an explanation of the politics of the South China Sea or what happened in Tanamen Square in 1989, the model will simply refuse to answer because it is closely linked with the Chinese government.

And I would go so far as to suggest it is promulgating. It is promulgating propaganda in a lot of the positions that it takes. So again, there's a trade off. Do you want the cheap and efficient model or do you want one that's more likely to answer a question in a particular way? A popular podcast in the UK recently, the hosts asked a series of AI models whether Donald Trump was corrupt and just compared the answers that they got out of each of those models.

And what became quite clear is that there are biases built into all of them. Last week, [01:00:00] researchers found that when Grok Elon Musk's AI model was asked a question, one of the data sources that it looked at was going back and looking at his public tweets to make sure it wasn't going to contradict him.

Just reflect on that for a moment. We've got a world here that's potentially being shaped by powerful actors who have vested interests. So for all of us, there's this really interesting question about which models we use. I will just give a shout out to a European AI company called Misra which has a, an open European language model.

It uses licensed training data. And while I don't believe it's perfect, I'm not naive, I think it looks it presents me with fewer ethical challenges than I see with some of the other models. But what I would say with all of this. As you would choose any other tool or as you would choose [01:01:00] any human being who was going to give you advice or feedback, you'd think carefully before accepting feedback on your writing.

Wouldn't you? Do your research on the model. Look at the people who are behind it, think about their perspectives, think about the data and the motives that they have, and all of that will help you

to arrive at whether you personally feel comfortable with a particular model. I can't give you an answer to that question.

You will all reach your own view on it, but there's a ton of data out there. There's a ton of information. There is some really good people on Simon Willison, whose name I will put into the chat is a researcher in this area and his blog is one of, I think, the most independently minded sources that that's out there.

He's equally critical of everyone. So do your research, who figure out what's right for you.

Parul - LWS: So on the topic of, individuals making choices in the face of, or with AI tools and in the face of [01:02:00] some of the some of the ways in which they've been training a writer wrote in to, to ask this question, how can we use AI ethically when we know it was trained by seal, the work of our fellow writers and artists?

How would you respond to this writer?

George Walkley: I would say that's a perfectly valid perspective, and I know plenty of people who do not use AI at all for that reason. Now, I come at this from a pragmatic perspective. Number one, it's becoming harder to avoid AI because it is being built into all of the software and applications that we use on the whole in 2022, I had to make an intentional decision to go and use chat GPT.

Now, copilot is being built into Outlook and Microsoft Word. It's appearing in the tools that I use every day. So while it is a principle position not to use it, it's harder and harder to avoid, and the line gets very blurry.

Parul - LWS: And I guess for writers individually though, we can always [01:03:00] choose not to simply not to use it for writing.

George Walkley: Absolutely, and that's a, again, everyone will have their own view here. I must admit, I do not like using it for writing because I don't think however much, I think however much I tweak and however much I try, I don't think it captures my tone of voice. I don't think it captures my thought process. Every time I've tried to get it to write something from a simple email up to a paragraph of copy, I've had to come in and spend a lot of time reworking it.

So I don't believe using it to create original copy as effective. I use it for different things myself. Because I've reached my own decision to do that, but none of you have to do that. You all have the option to not use it. If you would feel more comfortable with that. I think that the applications that I'm using it for are, I don't know, being honest with you.

Maybe this is clutching its drawers, [01:04:00] but I think the kinds of things that I use it for are less likely to have been shaped by individual author's work and more likely to have been shaped by the internet, Wikipedia, Reddit, other data sources. And very often I'm using, I'm actually uploading my own data and working with it, and I've made an informed decision that I'm okay with that and I've opted into it.

So for me, I feel comfortable with this. I've just seen, Deborah has asked a really interesting question in the chat, and I'd love to pick this up now if we have time, which is de Deborah's question is, what about using Grammarly for grammar checks? Okay. I think this is super, super interesting.

Where do we draw the line with ai? Let's suppose all of you have written a chapter of your book and you put that work in Progress chapter into chapter two PT and say, give me feedback or edit this, or turn 1500 words into 2000, whatever it might be. I [01:05:00] think all of us would say really straightforwardly.

Yeah, that's an AI usage. Grammarly is super interesting because there is a really sophisticated AI model sitting behind it and it's taking your work and it's not just doing a straightforward spell check, but it's making stylistic suggestions. Ag. Now, again, I would say that's very definitely ai. But I take Deborah's example slightly further.

What about Microsoft Word? We have all grown up using spell check in word for generations now. Most of us probably wouldn't think of that spell check as being ai, but Microsoft is rolling out co-pilot behind the scenes in all of its software. There is a really sophisticated AI model sitting there.

The way that it uses your data is probably better than most, but I'd still advise you to read the terms and conditions. So all of these are examples of ai. Adobe, the [01:06:00] software company did some really interesting research in the United States last year. They asked American consumers, do you use AI on a daily basis?

And about a quarter of people said that they did. When the researchers followed up, they found that the real proportion was nearly 80% because there were so many things in our daily lives. I took a photograph the other day on, on I was out of the country. I took a photograph of my daughter and just without thinking, I pressed the enhance button in on my iPhone.

And it cleared up the exposure, it did the color balance. It made a quite ordinary picture actually look quite nice. Now, all of that is AI behind the scenes and all of it has been trained on photographer's work. Is it ethical to do that? Most of us probably just do that without thinking about it. So if there's one thing maybe that you take away from this evening, just take the next 24 hours of your life [01:07:00] and be mindful and think about all of the things that you do with digital tools and services.

And think about how many of them actually have AI sitting behind the scenes. And I think you will be surprised at how many of them do.

Parul - LWS: And just a bit of a time check for me, maybe one or two more questions for me, and then we'll turn it over to you in case you do have any questions. So if you do put them in the chat I'll just

George Walkley: very briefly acknowledge Eric's point that, yeah.

So

Parul - LWS: I might actually read this out for you and we can integrate this. So Eric says there's quite a difference between machine learning, which is about optimizing existing processes and generate it generative ai, which creates something new. Yeah. Would you like to respond to that?

George Walkley: Yeah, no, I think that's absolutely right.

It goes back to that point I made at the beginning that AI's, is a very broad field. Now, something like optimizing a photograph is probably more on the machine learning side, but that machine learning has been trained on huge numbers of photos. Most of us, if we didn't opt out or maybe we weren't even given the choice, [01:08:00] our photos will have been trained on.

Professional photographer's work will have been trained on to teach that machine learning model how to adjust the color balance or apply a depth of field or any other creative choice. It's not just about optimization, it's also about creative choice. I'm pressing that button and I'm making an image better in particular on particular vectors.

And all of those are quite creative decisions that are shaped by previous creative work. So I think there is a difference, Eric, but I think the line can get blurry quite fast.

Parul - LWS: Alright, thanks for that question, Eric. Or comment and maybe just to go back to the individual, so I wanna just circle around to what any of us might do if we are, potentially taking a deal with a publisher.

So publishing, you mentioned that with a publisher we should check our contracts quite carefully,

George Walkley: a hundred percent.

Parul - LWS: Where [01:09:00] might we get advice on that, how to do that? So even with the agent or the publisher?

George Walkley: Absolutely. So the Society of Authors is a wonderful resource. They are very active in this area.

They defend their members' interests, very tenaciously. They have a really good public policy and lobbying operation. And I believe that even before getting a publishing deal, you can join as an associate member and they will provide advice to you. So I think that's a really tremendous place to look.

I think that there are also other great resources. LWSI think is a fantastic organization and you clearly provide a community where people can talk to one another, share best practices, and. Heaven forbid, perhaps even share horror stories and learn from those so that they don't happen again.

So I think there's a lot about exchanging perspectives with other authors. There are other industry people out there. Jane Friedman for example, I think is a great example of someone with her email newsletters and webinars and community who provides a [01:10:00] great deal of advice. So there is information out there for the taking, if you look for it.

Parul - LWS: And Society of Authors is UK based, is it The Authors Guild in, in the us Is that correct?

George Walkley: Sorry, could you just repeat the question? Your signal cut for a second there.

Parul - LWS: Ah, sorry. The Society of Authors, I believe is focused for UK authors. Is it the Author's Guild in the us?

George Walkley: That's exactly right.

The author's Guild is the US equivalent.

Parul - LWS: Great. I made one final question for me before we. I'll, in case there are any other audience questions coming through, which I'll check in just a moment your writing, and I'd just like to touch upon your writing. So you have a newsletter and you're writing a book.

Can you tell us a little bit about both those?

George Walkley: Sure. So the newsletter is something that I publish every week. It comes at Friday lunchtime, UK time, and it is unsurprisingly on AI and publishing. And the idea is to summarize in five minutes of reading time the key things that have happened that week, but [01:11:00] specifically to explain why they are relevant to the book business.

So it's great that there's this new shiny piece of technology, but what does it mean for publishers, for authors, booksellers, librarians? So everything is related back to our business. Now that's a really useful thing for me because it provides a discipline every Friday, with the exception, I think, of the holiday season.

I think I had one week off there. Every Friday, I have 1200 words of copy that goes out to get 1200 words of copy and probably eight to 10 things that I'm commenting on. I'm probably going to have to read between 30 and 40 articles to get to the eight or 10 that I care about that fit the theme of the week, where there's some kind of thread between them, and I can weave a narrative from each piece to the next.

So it's a forcing function that makes me read a lot. If I don't keep on top of this, I can't write that copy. [01:12:00]

Parul - LWS: Where are you reading? Is it just articles that you come across on Google? Are there particular sources?

George Walkley: It's it's the trade press. It's news feeds, it's email newsletters, it's podcasts, it's private correspondence with people that I know in Silicon Valley or in other technology centers.

It's a huge range of. Inputs coming in that I'm synthesizing and trying to figure out, okay, of this, what do I think is most relevant? And sometimes that's not the story that's got most attention in the week. It's finding the thing that's been neglected elsewhere. Now, doing that, first of all, as a discipline to make me read, it's also a discipline to make me write, because I have this social contract with the readership that come Friday lunchtime, there's going to be something for you to look at.

And so I have to get something out on time and as a way of defeating my own tendency to procrastinate. That's a really useful thing sense. So that's. That's been a great discipline outta [01:13:00] that. I started, I think the other reason why I really recommend the other two reasons that I really recommend newsletters for writers.

Number one, you are building an audience. You are building an audience that you can talk to directly. Whether or not you have a publisher, whether you are published by Penguin or whether

you are on KDP, there are people out there who respond to you. And actually it's all good data. If lots of people click on a link, that's great 'cause I know they're interested in it.

Actually, if a bunch of people unsubscribe in a week, that's also really good data for me because it means that I'm not resonating with them. So that audience relationship is a really positive thing. The other thing that's really valuable to me is that if you do a newsletter and just. Just turn up week after week for 10, 20, 30, or more weeks as I've done.

You start to see patterns as a tool for pattern recognition. It's absolutely wonderful, and what was becoming [01:14:00] clear to me is that there was a lot. Happening with AI that I couldn't really scratch the surface of in a newsletter. Actually, I wanted to get into longer form arguments about some of these things.

So I then sat down and specified a book, which boringly enough is about AI and strategy and decision making.

Parul - LWS: What, do you have a title or an angle that you're coming

George Walkley: in? It's a the title is a working title, which is horrible, which is the AI strategist. I'm gonna come up with something that's considerably snappier once I have a first draft complete.

And the angle is really about having a balanced view of ai, a pragmatic view, understanding where it can help, in which areas it can add value, and in which areas you should be very careful. And I'm going to risk disrupting this whole thing by just picking up my computer and. Turning it round for everyone's benefit.

And on the [01:15:00] wall of my office, you can see a sea of post colored Post-it note.

Parul - LWS: Yeah, I see that.

George Walkley: Yeah. It's the chapter structure for the book. This is the other great discipline that I have, that it sits there staring at me and reproaching me the entire time. There is no getting away from it. There is no ignoring it.

And it's quite helpful to make sure that I hit my quota every day.

Parul - LWS: I'll tell you what, ending on your craft and your process is really in keeping with everything that we love at the salon. So thank you so much for this insightful conversation. And really just as someone commented in the chat, just giving us such a.

Clear in it for me, simple understanding of the landscape. That has been, quite confusing and obviously there's there's so much more to come. So thank you very much and I invite you for any writers here, if you want to turn your video on, let George see who you are. I'd love for him to get a sense of who's in the room.

George Walkley: Absolutely.

Parul - LWS: Feel free to show your faces and say hello. We have such [01:16:00] a wonderful way of answers here.

George Walkley: Eric. Love Eric. I love the bookcases behind you. That's a very good room.

Parul - LWS: And actually Eric is is looks after our AI room in the London Writer Cell on and is the founder of Cred Tent.

Excellent. Yes, earlier, he's our resident expert. So friends, I invite you to unmute yourself and let's give George a London writer a salon on round of applause. You should be able to unmute yourself. Alright, thanks so much.

George Walkley: Absolute pleasure.

Parul - LWS: All right, everyone. Thanks so much for being here. Thanks for listening.

Thank you for your comments and questions. Really appreciate it. I hope this has been as interesting to you as it has been for me and hopefully slightly enlightening. I feel that amongst all the difficult things that we've heard about, there is definitely some hope that I've taken away from it, and definitely a better understanding.

That's it. We're done. Thanks again, George. Thanks so much for your insight.

George Walkley: Thank you very much everyone. Have a great rest of your day, and thanks again for the invitation to join you.

Parul - LWS: You're very welcome. We'll be sending all the links we'll look up your handles, but if someone wants to stay in touch with you, what is the best way to do that?

George Walkley: [01:17:00] Best thing is subscribe to the newsletter, which has my contact details in it, www george walkley.com/newsletter. And as I say all my contact details are in that on a weekly basis, and I'd love to hear from you.

Parul - LWS: Really appreciate you. Thank you, George. Take care, everyone, till we write again.

George Walkley: Bye.