

OXFORD 2000
The Fiesole Collection Development Series
Keble College Oxford July 20-22 2000
Wind-up talk by Anthony Watkinson

Derek Law was due to give this talk. I regret that he could not. Not only would he have had some interesting things to say, but I would not have had to make notes throughout the meeting. My take on the presentations and discussions will be rather different from what he would have given you. I am sure however that he would not have given a summary of what came before but would have reflected on the themes that seemed to have emerged. I shall do likewise.

Derek and I are both tall men with beards but we have something else in common. We are both members of the Reform Club – perhaps the grandest (architecturally at least) of the London clubs. There is a lesson to be drawn here or at least a metaphor. The Reform Club, as its name indicated, was founded by the statesmen who piloted the Reform Act of 1832, which can simplistically be described as the first reform of the British constitution. The constitutional crisis which preceded the final passing of the Act through a reluctant House of Lords led to high spots such as the burning of Nottingham Castle, which belonged to the Duke of Newcastle – a diehard opponent.

Nevertheless (and here the tenuous connection comes in) none of those founders, ranging from Whig aristocrats such as Earl Grey (of the tea?) to the radical “Irish liberator” Daniel O’Connell, were revolutionaries. The “terror” of the French Revolution was too close for that. At this meeting we are all reformers. I did not hear any revolutionary orations. It seems to me that in contrast to the situation a few years ago when serious reconstruction seemed likely, most of us are now keen to make the system work better than to overturn it. This is a value-neutral statement. I do not necessarily applaud the fact.

When I write reports for the AAP I try to detect a buzz word which represents the spirit of the conference. I could not find one this time. What I did find was the “quote of the meeting” from the contribution by Peter Burnhill. I forget the origin but it ran:

The present is a gift, man. That is why it is called the present

Yes, in spite of the given title for this Retreat what is remarkable about what we have heard is that almost everyone talked about the present and not about where we might be in 2005. The word “paradigm” was very little used for a change. But where are we trying to get to?

My picture is that rather than knowing exactly what we want to end up with we are working along certain lines and evoking certain principles – many of which are implicit. For the rest of this “wind-up” I am aim to elicit the principles which I found in the talks or at least those which appeal to the way I see things.

I was pleased that Rene Olivieri drew attention to Mark Bide’s work on the “value-chain”. Unfortunately most of his more detailed thinking on this topic is hidden in

commissioned reports which have never been published. Some of his thinking about the way knowledge is transmitted from author to reader is however to be found in various chapters of *From N to X: The Impact on the Publishing Value Chain from Online Networks* (1997) at www.vistapublishing.com. The point I want to draw from this now is that in this room we are all intermediaries. What we do has value to the extent that we add value. There is added-value in what publishers do and in what libraries do. There may well be added-value in what subscription agents and book vendors do. We should not weep too much with Chris Tyzack today or with John Secor at the Charleston Conference last year. If the function they or their successors offer is needed, they will survive.

One principle that I would draw from the contributions over the last two days is that all the current functions involved in the transmission of ideas and information are likely to continue in the Internet environment and to a large extent the same players will exercise the same functions. Future schemes not based on this understanding are unlikely to work.

As someone who comes mainly from a publishing background I was struck particularly by the fact that librarians provide for their users not just published material but data and other information that has not been published. Publishers by definition publish. Thus Rodney Milne (in his contribution) was concerned entirely with material not published. The implications of the different understandings produced by these different experiences need to be unravelled. In the electronic environment librarians have to be aware of the differences between material they are digitising and material "born digital" – electronic files prepared as such. The value-added for this material is created by publishers and the preparation is exacting and expensive. Publishers on the other hand are now having to recognise that journal articles (for example) do not exist in a separate universe from databases and grey literature. Peter Boyce explained how the American Astronomical Society did actually handle links from their articles to all the other matter out there.

Peter is someone moving straight to 2005 as he moved from 1995 (actually 1992) to 2000 more or less without altering an agenda which rightly is based upon what his community wants. For his archive see www.aas.org/~pboyce. What the community wants is (in his words) a "seamless information flow". His community is one where authors overlap entirely with readers, which makes for a clear vision but only partly helps the rest of us. We did not talk much about the digital object identifier and the initiatives associated with it. Yet identification of what and where is central to linking what authors want to "transmit" and readers want to "receive". To my mind there will have to be a lot of hard talking between publishers and librarians over the next few years to make linking work. Every conference that happens makes clear that to realise the goal which all us intermediaries share is going to be more difficult and more expensive than we had once thought.

How do we as intermediaries know what users want? We are beginning to get a little nearer to some answers not possible before. David Kohl's paper giving us a taster on what we can extract from the riches of the OhioLink database was for me a high point in the meeting. Does the consortium movement provide what users really want? Will the model collapse (as I think it might) and, if so, what will replace it? To me the interesting point is that publishers and librarians are working together within a framework that suits them both – at least in the short term. They are united in giving access to more content to the users. It is a highly pragmatic framework.

There seems little doubt that there is serious reading or at least searching of journals not previously available once they are made available electronically but would it not have been better if the journals actually on the faculty wish-list could have been bought instead? I do however suspect that this question may be rhetorical and/or unrealistic.

Usage statistics are one of the highly technical areas like metadata that we are all going to have to get our head around. There is quite a corpus of knowledge building up about pitfalls of interpretation. The information age presents big problems alongside the big opportunities. It was good to have Don King present to make the telling points. The concept of "time" – the time it takes to scan and to read – is a useful corrective concept, which reminds us that our intermediary role is much to do with selection. There is too much content out there and much of it is not worth reading. The patrons only have so much time.

Don is also a great expert on costs. His book with Carol Tenopir [*Towards Electronic Journals: Realities for Scientists, Librarians and Publishers*] is not long out and really does show (inter alia) where those publishing costs are to be found. Details can be found at www.sla.org. Costs impact across the chain. It seems to me that the concept of the "hybrid" library (intrinsically more expensive) is replacing that of the "virtual" library (potentially cheaper) which we hear so much about. I am uncertain whether print has to continue but I suspect it does even though this may mean printing out rather than delivery by post – transferring the cost. Print is useful. Or is this just an age thing? An alliance between publishers and librarians to get rid of print because it is cheaper for both sectors might not be a valid principle to work with.

Actually the big question does however seem to me to be how do we make what we as intermediaries do more cost-effective. It seems to me that the recognition of this question was implicit in almost all the presentations. My view is that it is our job to make it more explicit. Let us take the question of licensing. The work of Ann Okerson and others has raised the whole business of licenses from an area of despair and distrust to one where cross-sectoral solutions have been actually achieved. In the UK we can reasonably give a plug for the PA/JISC model licence which was brought about by a group of representatives from both the academic/academic library sector and publishers. John Cox, in the audience, could reasonably claim credit for the follow-up licenses available at www.licensingmodels.com. This sort of initiative saves money and the money can be spent on content. If I might continue to dwell on the UK context, the continuing joint committee, now called PALS (Publishing and Library Solutions Committee), is now moving on to look at other areas where discussions across the publisher/library divide can lead to better and more cost-effective decisions.

After this short list of what I got out of a very enjoyable meeting and to conclude it with a suitable theme to take away, let me offer **partnership**. Am I over-optimistic and/or unrealistic in seeing this concept as implicit in many of the contributions? As I understand it the Fiesole series was intended to allow for reflection in a busy life. This is where my reflections have led me.

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14 August 2000