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Acquisitions Archaeology - Valuing Anxiety (Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1990)

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Technology Left Behind from page 76


In the same way that some libraries have created institutional **Netflix** accounts, permitting patrons to check out items ordered via **Netflix** through the library, libraries could create a **DeepDyve** account, allowing their patrons to preview thousands of journal articles for just \$0.99 per article. For the modest commitment of \$19.99 a month, the cost of the Gold plan, libraries could have at their disposal a database of tens of thousands of articles with no restrictions on the number of articles that can be viewed or on the duration of each view.

There are certainly logistical issues to be addressed for libraries considering a **DeepDyve** subscription. For example, if a library maintains a single **DeepDyve** subscription for its institution, individual users would lose the ability to bookmark articles and create alerts. Each individual user could set up his or her own account for the purposes of searching and bookmarking materials, but then a procedure would have to be established whereby the patron communicated to the library which articles he or she wanted to rent.

Were this type of plan successfully implemented, it could have an impact on interlibrary loan, document delivery, electronic reserves, and many other areas of library operations. While **DeepDyve** is certainly not an equivalent to these services, it could offer both libraries and their patrons the opportunity to thoroughly preview an article before paying an ILL fee, document delivery fee, or much higher pay-per-view fee. Libraries have before them the opportunity to provide a unique service to their patrons. It remains to be seen how such a service will be implemented.

If your library has a **DeepDyve** subscription or is considering setting up a **DeepDyve** account of some kind, I would be very interested in hearing from you.

Reference

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Acquisitions Archaeology — Valuing Anxiety (Vol. 2 No. 1, February 1990)

Column Editor: **Jesse Holden** (Coordinator of Technical Services, Millersville University) <jesse.holden@millersville.edu>

First of all, I want to assure you that this is not going to be some kind of overwrought philosophical treatise, in hopes that you continue reading to the second paragraph. However, as a point of departure, I would like to briefly discuss **Michel Foucault's** notion of "discursive formations." This is a term that we may use when "between objects, types of statement, concepts, or thematic choices, one can define a regularity (an order, correlations, positions and functionings, transformations)." This is not the same thing as an overt, deliberate theme (like when you plan a party where the plates, napkins, and thank-you cards all feature dinosaurs, as has been the case with my son's birthday parties for the past couple of years). Discursive formations concern, rather, "the relations that may legitimately be described between the statements that have been left in their provisional, visible grouping."² In other words, I am looking at ideas that go together for some reason — even if they don't initially appear to (or didn't seem to at the time). Following **Foucault**, "I have decided to describe statements in the field of discourse and the relations of which they are capable."³ (Say *what...?* For the sake of readability, I promise to refrain from quoting **Foucault** going forward...)

In February of 1990, I was still four years away from being confused by **Foucault** for the first time. In that same month, *ATG* reached a milestone by beginning its second volume. A strong undercurrent through Issue 1 is, perhaps not surprisingly, an anxiety about journals. This anxiety becomes manifest in a couple of ways but the result is a kind of Foucaultian discursive formation about the value of journals. This sounds simple enough, of course, but working through this issue without having been a part of the acquisitions milieu at the time left me without much context. Indeed, I soon found myself faced with a rather curious mystery.

Coverage of the 1990 Midwinter meeting was fairly brief, but important. I started my investigation with the summary of the "ACRL Journal Pricing Discussion Group — January 7, 1990," which featured three speakers.⁴ The first speaker, who would play a much larger role in the aforementioned mystery than I could have realized, led off the panel discussion. His advice to librarians who are acquiring scientific journals is to "write to publishers and say you do not want...[conference] proceedings as part of the journal" as a way to reduce "the cost without reducing the quality of the collection."⁵ **Eugene Garfield** spoke next, recommending a

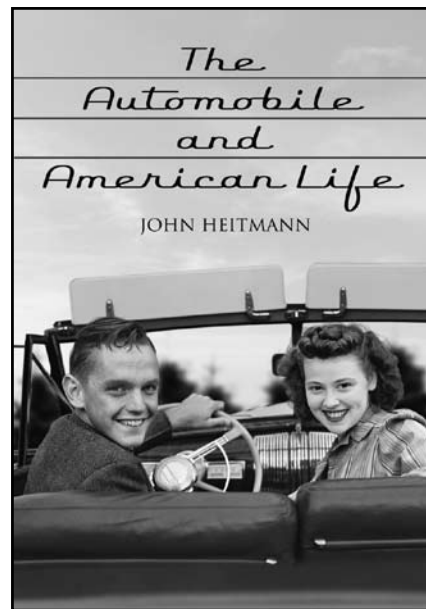
"fair audit of all publishers, including all factors of journal publishing."⁶ This proposed system would explicitly allow value judgments to be factored into an otherwise "too simplistic" comparison of cost-effectiveness. (Unstated is the role that a system of value judgments might play in the journal market beyond merely calculating cost-effectiveness. My continued investigation only confirmed that, indeed, such implications were not lost on anyone....) The third presenter, **Robert Sherrill**, in his discussion of non-profit publishers points out that from an association's point of view that newer commercial publications are both narrower in focus and lower in quality.⁷ While **Sherrill** obviously represents just one point of view (his own) on another point of view (non-profit publishing), such an assertion clearly underscores some tension in the discursive field of scholarly communication-qua-scientific-journal-publishing.

So the panel discussion reveals the following about the state of scientific journal publishing at the dawn of 1990:

1. Interest in reducing extraneous content to curb journal size as a measure to lower cost (and therefore increase value),

continued on page 78

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2. Perceived obfuscation of journal publishing that prevents a nuanced comparison of cost-effectiveness, and
3. Tension concerning coverage and quality between not-for-profit and commercial publishing.

And now things start to get interesting...

A short blurb (presented here in its entirety) notes that the "*Chronicle of Higher Education* for January 24 has a letter from the **American Institute of Physics** and the **American Physical Society** giving responses to the **Gordon & Breach** issue."⁸ Whenever an "issue" gets its own name, one can assume that it has achieved a certain threshold of public consciousness. However, once the issue fades, so, too, does public consciousness. I am quite certain that I have never heard of "The **Gordon & Breach** Issue," though it is likely many who were part of that milieu still remember quite a bit about it.

Further along, things get even more perplexing. Two letters composed by **Duane Webster** (who, in 1990, had just recently been appointed **ARL's** executive director) are printed on page 29. The first letter, dated January 19, poses a question to **ARL** directors about a mysterious survey issued by **The Foundation for International Scientific Cooperation**. Information about **The Foundation** and the purpose of its survey seemed to be almost nonexistent and, not surprisingly, suspicious. The revelations of the second letter, also addressed to **ARL** directors and dated January 24, are further informed by some of the information I have noted above. The **Foundation's** survey was posted using a meter registered to **Gordon & Breach** (see above) who, **Webster** writes, "as you are aware, ... is conducting a lawsuit against **Dr. Barschall**, **The American Institute of Physics**, and **The American Physical Society**" (see above).

Shifting gears, but very much related to what has proceeded, is what might be described as a two-page "info-tisement" (is it an ad? is it an article?) that covers pages 14 and 15. The title, running across the two pages reads: "INFORMATION from **Elsevier Science Publishers**." The pages are divided into upper and lower registers. The top one is devoted to brief synopses of the key elements in the journal publishing process: peer review, speed of publication, society affiliations, page charging, advertising sales. The lower register identifies major scientific journal types ("academic research journal (commercial)" "academic research journal (society)," "professional journal (commercial)," etc.) and lists several characteristics of publishing each kind of journal ("no page charges," "refereeing is rigorous," etc.). It is, perhaps, all too easy to suspect a conspiracy when **Elsevier** does something a little out of the ordinary. However, this info-tisement struck me as a bit weird and really cemented in my mind that the discursive formation being articulated within this **ATG** issue was not about value, per se, but about *anxiety about value*.

Back to the Midwinter coverage, a summary of the Publisher/Vendor/Library Relations Committee reveals that the committee

against the grain people profile

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Jesse Holden

BORN AND LIVED: In and around San Jose, CA; Morris, MN; and now Lancaster, PA.

EARLY LIFE: It never occurred to me that I might be a librarian.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: I started in acquisitions at **Stanford Law Library**, eventually becoming the Acquisitions Librarian, then joined the **Stanford University Libraries** as Ordering Librarian. I have been in my current position at **Millersville** since 2007. I've also been an instructor for the **ALCTS** online "Fundamentals of Acquisitions" course since 2006, and started with the "Fundamentals of Electronic Resource Acquisitions" course last year.

FAMILY: Wife **Elizabeth**, son **Elliot**, and baby daughter **Adelaide**.

IN MY SPARE TIME: Outings with my family, especially the **Philadelphia Zoo** or **Longwood Gardens** (and last November to Charleston). I also enjoy writing with fountain pens...but not trying to fix them.

FAVORITE BOOKS: *A Thousand Plateaus* by **Gilles Deleuze** and **Felix Guattari**, *House of Leaves* by **Mark Danielewski**, *Lord of the Rings* by **J.R.R. Tolkien** (illustrated by **Alan Lee**), *Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya* by **Simon Martin**, **Mary Ellen Miller**, and **Kathleen Berrin**, *The Museum at Purgatory* by **Nick Bantock**.

PET PEEVES: Doing things that way because that's how we've always done them. And wet socks.

PHILOSOPHY: "Change is constant," or perhaps "You never step in the same library twice." Also, it's my favorite subject.

MOST MEMORABLE CAREER ACHIEVEMENT: Completing the manuscript for my forthcoming book, *Acquisitions in the New Information Universe: Core Competencies and Ethical Practices*, due out from **Neal-Schuman** in early 2010.

GOAL I HOPE TO ACHIEVE FIVE YEARS FROM NOW: Catch up with weeding my yard.

HOW/WHERE DO I SEE THE INDUSTRY IN FIVE YEARS: Pricing models and licensing will have to be even more standardized than they already are, since neither budgets nor staffing are increasing enough to allow for a "workflow of exceptions." The continued push towards and preference for electronic access will result in new models for content creation, dissemination, management, and access. In terms of access, the traditional idea of "the collection" will continue to be important but it will also be marginalized as the expectations about information and its subsequent usage continues to change. Librarians will have increasingly collaborative interactions with publishers, information end-users, and each other. 🐾



unanimously agreed to support a resolution forwarded by **ALA** and **ALCTS** "supporting publication and studies concerning the comparative cost of scientific and technical journals publishing and disapproval of litigation in response to such studies."⁹ Here we learn that **Dr. Barschall** is being sued for a *Physics Today* article calculating cost-effectiveness of 200 physics journals, which definitely helps explain some things.

The last featured write-up in this issue of **ATG** is a "Resolution on Free Scholarly Discourse," which was "passed at **ALA Midwinter**," reproduced without editorial comment, and presumably the same one unanimously supported by the Publisher/Vendor/Library Relations Committee.¹⁰ The resolution affirms

that "analysis, publication, and dissemination of studies and other information concerning the competitive costs of such materials and services are of vital importance to the library community."¹¹ The resolution ultimately concludes "that the **American Library Association** disapproves the use of litigation for the purposes of discouraging the publication of such studies and information rather than engaging in the exchange of views and scholarly debate."¹² Certainly the timing of such a resolution is not coincidental.

So, in sum, we have a panel discussion, a lawsuit, some "INFORMATION from **Elsevier Science Publishers**," and an **ALA** resolution. At this point, we have something that started out

continued on page 79

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Acquisitions Archaeology from page 78

to look like a *theme* (e.g., dinosaurs, science journals, etc.), but has emerged as something of a real *correlation*. It turns out — like so many other aspects of Western commercial culture — that the key to making sense of all this is in the lawsuit. With the study of the past comes the perspective of the future, so I skipped ahead to *ATG* vol. 2 no. 3 (June 1990). There I learned in “Rumors” that a Trial Court in West Frankfurt had dismissed the **Gordon & Breach** suit against AIP and APS.¹³ It was actually an ARL document from 1997 — more than seven years later — that provided some broader perspective.¹⁴ **Gordon & Breach**, scientific publishers, had sued **Dr. Barschall** for his cost analysis of physics journals that showed, in particular, AIP and APS journals to be more cost effective than commercial publications, such as those from **Gordon & Breach**. The latter then sued the former for false advertising under the *Lanham Act*. I still do not know all the details about “The **Gordon & Breach** Issue” — the 1997 U.S. District Court ruling in favor of the defendants was not the end of it, as **Gordon & Breach** vowed to appeal — but what I *do* know gives me the confidence to say that I have found my Foucaultian *correlation*. This correlation creates a contextual matrix for the heightened sensitivity to *consideration of* (and *anxiousness about*) the value of scientific journal publishing we see reflected in *ATG* vol. 2 no. 1.

Value, of course, remains an ongoing factor in scholarly communication, for producers, distributors, and consumers of scientific content. With many libraries facing severe — in some cases dire — budget reductions, calculating value is perhaps an even more essential function than ever before. Today, our notion of value is based on expanded online journal access informed by increasingly **COUNTER**-compliant statistics, but routinely bound by confidentiality clauses or locked into bundled packages, deals, and aggregated content products. When reflecting on the past and contemplating an uncertain future, a question must be asked (and eventually answered): Is the legacy of this anxious past a refined, granular calculation of value *within* the library... or is it rather something more sinister, where we are now prevented from calculating content value *across* libraries? **Fred Friend** has recently noted one librarian’s description of restrictions on pricing disclosure as “the elephant in the room” when stakeholders in scholarly communication meet to address budgetary concerns.¹⁵ Perhaps there is still cause for anxiety. 🐘

Endnotes

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15. **Fred Friend**, LIBLICENSE-L, November 27, 2009, 8:54 pm., subj: The elephant in the room. <http://www.library.yale.edu/~license/ListArchives/0912/msg00003.html>.