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Back Talk-Double Fold or Double Talk

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Back Talk
from page 94

a student and loved using full text journals, I
can't wholeheartedly support the idea that digi-
tal access in the absence to the original is bad.
Looking at our full text download statistics also
convinces me that full text is extremely popu-
lar with all users — not just me. Yes, I under-
stand that the OCR technology that is going
on behind my searches, and then reading PDF
versions of the original pages, is a joke; but
such indexing lets me scan so many more ar-
ticles than I would have otherwise. And I find
that I am equally enthusiastic about electronic
reference works, monographs, and especially
electronic dissertations. But if I didn't have
sufficient funds to do both (Columbia does),
I would feel justified in buying only digital
and hope that the student who wants/needs to
use the printed version will be able to borrow
it from libraries than can afford to do both or
who are anti-digital.

So in the end I enjoyed reading Baker's
hyperbolic diatribe in a self flagellating sort
of way, although I totally protest/condemn his
personal attacks on Pat Battin. She has vi-
sion and integrity, rare qualities and rarer to
be found in the same person. She is guilty of
taking part in promoting the Slow Fires hype,
but she is not alone in her use of this tech-
tique to draw attention to a problem that she
feels strongly about. Mr. Baker is equally
guilty of this sin as well. He made several
points that are worth serious consideration.

Desperately Seeking Website
from page 92

our online account. It happens every renewal
that we lose 2-10 journals , then have to con-
tact the publishers to re-establish access.

PUB: Would you like to see the print and
online subscription process even more con-
solidated so that the subscription agents
handle everything from payment of subscrip-
tions to handling of site licenses?

LIB: I hate giving up the authority but
relish the idea of time saved. Of course, the
ideal would be for you to throw the online access or print in for free. The future of sub-
cription services is a difficult thing to pre-
dict. The large publishers could make it eco-
nomically attractive to deal directly with them. In the short term, yes, I can see the
agents doing this for us.

PUB: In what ways do you see the online
environment improving for library customers?

LIB: I foresee that in the future the access points will likely be more standardized, in par-
ticular in regard to access from various cita-
tion indexes. Also I see handheld and wireless
technology as potentially having a significant impact upon the future online environment in
libraries.

You can ring me at (919) 620-0681 or email me at <anber@jbm.org> if you would like to add
to this discussion or suggest topics to ad-
dress in future columns.

DIVORCE HAPPENS TO LOVE GURUS
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)
Megabucks authors Ellen Fein and
Sherrie Schneider promoted The Rules as a
crude chronicle of their experiences in snagging the
wily male animal. Rules II was hot too, and
Rules III — holding that marriage through suberviscie, long hair and low ex-
pectations of male sympathy — was due out.
Then Fein let it drop to Warner Books that
she was about to divorce her husband. And
the action had been filed a year earlier ... be-
fore she signed the contract. She claims to have
kept it a secret hoping for a reconciliation.
Now the cover blurb will have to be redone,
dropping the claim to Fein's enduring mar-
riage. See—Devon Spurgeon, “Author’s Di-
vorce Pits Her ‘Rules’ Against Reality” in Wall

LEATHERSTOCKING TALES FROM MITTELEUROPA
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)
Thief and swindler Karl May's Westerns
have sold 100 million copies of 80 books,
making him the bestselling German author of
all time. His fans included Hitler and
Einstein, and he sparred with the German Wild
West clubs. Luft Hansa recently laid on
non-stop service to Phoenix to haul all the Ger-
man tourists to May literary sites. May died
in 1912 having never visited the Southwest.
All his data came from magazine articles
on Indian wars which he first found in a prison
library. Now the Karl May cult has hit Ameri-
can campuses—given wings by film exhibitors, film
festivals—possibly because the white men
were usually villains, thus passing the p.e. test.
Can doctoral dissertations and deconstruction
be far behind? See—Cecile Rohwedder,“Ger-
mans Have a Thing About the Wild West, Thanks to Karl May” in Wall Street Journal,

NICE WORK IF YOU CAN GET IT
by Bruce Strauch (the Citadel)
Sumner Redstone expanded his father's
drive-in movie chain into Viacom. It now owns
CBS, Paramount, MTV, Blockbuster and
Nickelodeon. And with the help of that neces-
sary “accomplished collaborator” he’s going
to tell us all about how he did it. Conveniently, Viacom owns the publisher Simon & Schuster.
Which is giving him a coast-to-coast publicity
tour, network t.v. appearances and a high-priced
“lay-down date.” That means the book will be
launched everywhere on a single day, which
requires a lot of tricky shipping. Sales staff
have been instructed to treat the launch as “A Passion to Keep Our Jobs,” a little word play on the
book's title A Passion for Winning. Traditionally, these
top exce books were highly suspect and were
taken to another publishing house to prove they
weren't total vanities. As you can guess, many
don't sell very well. See—Laura P. Cohen,
“Simon & Schuster Is More Than Excited About
A New Author,” in Wall Street Journal, p.A1,

ADVERTISERS’ INDEX

| 61 | ABC Clio | 37 | Book House | 35 | Institute of Physics |
| 25 | Absolute Backorder | 7, 21 | Bowker | 95 | Kluwer Academic |
| 45 | Academic Press | 41 | Cambridge Scientific Abstracts | 79 | MAJOR |
| 27 | ACM | 73 | Casalini Libri | 71 | McFarland |
| 48, 49 | ACS | 83 | The Charlestown Adviser | 96 | MIDWEST LIBRARY SERVICE |
| 13 | Alibris | 10 | The Charlestown Report | 8 | NEFLIBRARY |
| 2 | Alfred Jaeger | 77 | Choice | 81 | MARTINUS NIJHOF INT'L |
| 59 | Am. Institute of Physics | 69 | Walter de Gruyter | 87 | NISO |
| 17 | Am. Psychological Assoc. | 43 | Eastern Book Company | 67, 75 | OCLC |
| 33 | Am. Society of Plant Biologists | 53 | EBSCO Information Serv. | 47 | RITTENHOUSE |
| 51 | ASME International | 55 | Elsevier | 16 | SCHIDENBERG'S FOREIGN BOOKS |
| 5 | ATG | 31 | Energy Pratt | 63 | M.E. SHAPPE |
| 12 | Aux Amateurs De Livres | 85 | Emerson | 15 | SWEETS BLACKWELL |
| 14 | Bacsik Subscriptions, Inc. | 23 | Faxon, Renev Com | 65 | THOMSON LEARNING |
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<http://www.against-the-grain.com> 93

Against the Grain / June 2001
Before commenting on Nicholson Baker’s new expose on the sins of librarians, I must first confess that I was employed, until last month, by one of the evil university libraries depicted in his book and I was recruited by the central dark-side protagonist featured in *Double Fold: Libraries and the Assault on Paper*, *Random House*, 2001.

Baker’s book is a very personalized account in which he is the hero, and most librarians are the villains. He suggests that we:

1. Simplified/ lied about the wood pulp deterioration hyperbole: We said because the corners of a book or bound newspaper printed on acidic wood pulp paper will break when folded back and forth, within a few years the whole volume will crumble and become dust. The rate of wood pulp paper deterioration is not linear, but is greatly affected by actions under our control: the level and mode of use, temperature, humidity, etc.

2. Disbund newspaper runs and books prior to microfilming and then discarded the remains to speed the microfilming process and to avoid gutter shadow. Ignored filming book cradle positions that have been around for decades. Failed to resheive the remains or to find libraries who would put them on shelves for research use. In the process discarded thousands of rare and valuable materials.

3. Participated in film and sell schemes to pay for filming by selling off original newspaper runs to companies specializing in reselling them a page or article at a time, and we replaced them with incomplete and user unfriendly microfilm. These acts, in turn, facilitated the commercialization/privatization of the library’s cultural/intellectual heritage preservation function.

4. Failed to comprehend that the intellectual experience of working with the originals is different/superior to working with reformatted reproductions.

5. Put the saving of storage costs ahead of collection development and preservation functions. We fabricated statistics about the rate at which library collections grow in order to make the need to microfilm even more justifiable.

6. Broke moral, if legal agreements with donors by discarding the materials they gave or purchased for our libraries.

7. Supported/acquiesced to NEH’s fixation on filming in the name of preservation, instead of providing funds to repair and improve environmental conditions.

8. Minimized/falsified statements about the problems of microfilm: they fade; they make people motion sick when using them; and various kinds of film produce gasses that corrode boxes and cabinets, bubble/buckle/shrink/stick together, are easily scratched, and develop redox blemishes and fungi.

9. Lied about microfilming making money and conservation costing money, when the opposite is true. Microfilming is expensive in the long and short terms if we take into account the value of lost access to information. Conservation, including the boxing of little used materials, on the other hand, costs little.

10. Used resource sharing as a guise to avoid collection development all in the name of preventing the need for new shelving. The goal should be providing content to users, not avoiding the cost of building library buildings.

11. Held on to the double fold (or three fold and tug) technique to determine if a volume should be filmed when this technique has little to do with the reality of how bound volumes are used. Volumes whose corners break off can have their pages turned hundreds of times without ill consequence and structurally unsound books can be boxed and used for long periods of time, and volumes that are used intensively are a rarity and can be selectively replaced/preservation copi ed. To treat everything as if it will crumble tomorrow is dumb and expensive.

12. We did all of this to communicate the “Slow Fires” message: Spend now on microfilming or lose the content forever. If we didn’t personally initiate any of these actions, we allowed ourselves to be herded to one degree or another by those who did.

13. Promoted the idea that digitized texts are more useful than the originals because they are fully searchable and because they are more accessible — while ignoring the equally important value of working with originals.

14. Supported digitization projects when we know that the use of OCR (optical character recognition) software to make these volumes fully searchable is a joke.

15. Promoted the scan from film scan to justify the original filming and destruction that had already been done. Since no one wants to scan from film, the original destruction is discredited.

16. Failed to understand the economic and intellectual value of doing nothing: Doing nothing costs little (boxing) or nothing and doesn’t result in the destruction of books. Reformattling costs money and results in their destruction. Books and newspapers seemingly doomed to destruction.

17. Failed to learn from our mistakes: We destroyed texts in the failed micocard experiment, we destroyed texts in the “Slow Fires” movement, and now we are destroying texts in the current rush toward digitization. At least our current Bookkeepers deacification bandwagon doesn’t “appear to” be destroying the originals even though it is questionable that the money needs to be spent for materials that are already in storage.

My general reaction to these accusations is simply to admit that we’re guilty of many of the acts as charged. But to admit guilt to these acts is a bit like admitting having done all sorts of dumb things while a teenager: Yes, we put the band teacher’s VW bug on top of the gymnasium in 1959; but no, we have not done it lately.

Yet, I don’t want to minimize the seriousness of what has been done in the name of library preservation: We did hype the wood pulp movement including making the double fold test part of the library culture, supported the disbidding/discarding of bound volumes, sold off printed volumes replaced by film, minimized the importance of working with the original formats, continued to occupy with cost savings at the expense of user access, and went after and accepted the money NEH was willing to give (although we did get them to at least allow replacement/repair costs as part of the cost share). Most of these acts, however, are past practices. We were confronted with what we accepted as a problem, we did our best, and we made mistakes.

Some of these acts, however, are still current and these deserve additional serious thought and reflection: I am personally left looking for answers to three questions:

1. Should we continue to seek/take NEH reformattling money?

2. Should we give deacification any time or attention?

3. Should digitization efforts be instead of, or in addition to, providing access to printed materials?

My answers are no, no, and a qualified no.

No, shouldn’t continue to spend anyone’s money on reformattling materials unless there is truly no other alternative including inexpensive protective enclosures for all but the rare volume that is at the corn flakes stage. At Columbia we put away the preservation microfilm vacuum approach at least 15 years ago — and many would dispute if we ever really used it (well, maybe it was used for 30 or 40 feet of books).

I have always thought it was curious how reformattling could only be used for books no one was interested in: books for which there were no other editions including reprints available, too few copies had been printed in the first place to permit purchase on the OP market, and preservation photocopying couldn’t be justified on the basis of expected use. Books that passed each of these tests could be filmed. Staying no to NEH money, however, is easy for me since I am now in Hong Kong and can’t take the money.

No, we shouldn’t give systematic deacification any time or attention. This is a tough decision since one of my last acts at Columbia was to allocate $25,000 annually to employ the Bookkeepers approach for new books coming from countries not printing on acid free papers. Deacification is proactive, but I think the money spent on it would be better spent on my next judged no.

Should digital efforts be instead of, or in addition to, the continued purchase of printed materials? Having spent the last five years as

94 Against the Grain / June 2001