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Op-Ed-Opinions and Editorials-3 Takes on the Future of the Book

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Op—Ed — Opinions and Editorials

3 Takes on the Future of the Book...

by **Julia Gelfand** (U. of California, Irvine) <jgelfand@sun1.lib.uci.edu>

Several publications were issued in recent months that assessed and predicted what is happening with the book, the monograph, the scholarly item libraries acquire and retain anticipating what kind of readership will be attracted to it and hope that it will sustain generations of readers to come. These publications all had different takes on what is happening and why so many changes in the publishing industry are forcing such a significant discussion on the future of the book. We all know and recognize too well that the high prices of serials and new technologies have forced libraries to seriously review all their acquisitions very carefully in order to accommodate the wide variety of materials necessary to support their instruction and research collections for the short and long term. Different strategies were employed to stretch finances for the greatest buying power; many libraries conducted major serial cancellation projects; consortia were formed to better share resources; and fewer books were bought. Libraries continue to participate in organized interlibrary borrowing and lending programs with partners and the worldwide community identified through the bibliographic utilities of which they are members. We also entertain how changes in academe dictate to some degree publishing trends among the scholarly community. The publish or perish syndrome, however vital its practice, is being examined and the academic enterprise is gradually changing how faculty members are reviewed. Many institutions are reviewing their academic programs as well, and new degree and research programs replace existing ones and the information needs of the campus change. The increase in collaboration among academic colleagues and the emergence of new and specialized multidisciplinary introduces and forces new publishing markets.

Geoffrey Nunberg edited *The Future of the Book* (University of California Press, 1996) with papers presented at a conference held in Summer 1994 and his own chapter in that volume, "Farewell to the Information Age," discusses the challenges of electronic publishing. He writes, "For the present it's enough to observe that there is nothing in the economics of publishing as a whole or the body of practice surrounding the use of the printed book that militates for its disappearance, even over the long term. And while it is certain that many forms and genres will migrate

in part or in whole to an electronic mode of existence over the coming years, there are numerous other printed genres that stand to benefit from the new technologies, whether in the form of electronic text preparation, demand printing, Web advertising, or what may be most important, the computerized inventory systems that have made possible new types of retail distribution that have vastly extended general public access to texts over the past five years in ways that are arguably more significant than the effects of electronic media. There will be a digital revolution, but the printed book will be an important participant in it." (p. 104). The remainder of this chapter addresses the philology of information, the phenomenology of information, the properties of information, the future of information, information on the Web, and after information. We are reminded how critical the Web has become for exchange of information, commerce, communication and publishing.

Other chapters in this volume are equally provocative and interesting reading. Many contributors are well known academics and writers spanning different disciplines and who have been active in discussions about electronic publishing and scholarly communication. This conference for which the papers were prepared took place in Italy emphasizing the concept of a global electronic community where there was lots of interaction among participants. The international threads here are excellent because each and every issue is a global one and the implications about the future of the book strike scholars everywhere. Familiar scholars with chapters in this book include **Carl Hess**, **Reggae Derby**, **Patrick Basin**, **George Landau**, **James O'Donnell**, **Michael Joyce**, **Umberto Eco** and others. Each wonders in what context hypertext will be the language of the future. The issues are endless and the ideas gleaned from reading this volume encourage lots of discourse for all interested parties.

Daedalus devoted their Fall 1996 (volume #125, #4) issue to *Books, Bricks and Bytes* and 19 articles celebrate the centennial of the **New York Public Library**. Not only is the library the central focus of this issue, but there contains good background on how technology has changed the library from a print only environment to a very sophisticated electronic experience. The preface states, "It is not at all surprising that the digital library, with all



that it portends for the future of the book and the periodical, but also with all that it implies for the kinds of information that will be collected, for the problems of copyright, access and costs that will necessarily preoccupy those responsible for the libraries of the 21st century, should figure conspicuously in this *Daedalus* issue." (p. v).

The papers were contributed by movers and shakers in the library profession and reflect the full spectrum of library environments from the Library of Congress, public libraries, academic, research and national libraries abroad, in Britain, South Africa, France, Russia, Germany, and emphasize the relationships that librarians and readers have with the changing contents of libraries and how they are used. **Peter Lyman** opens the volume by exploring what is a digital library and it is almost like respondents offer insight into the clarity of related issues with many practical examples. Chapters by **James Billington**, the Librarian of Congress describe what the LC will be like when it celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2000 and how online its holdings will be; **Ann Okerson** who tackles the option of buying or leasing information and introduces the range of licenses available from different publishing outfits for different types of access; **Peter Young** challenges readers to think broadly about what the profession of librarianship currently includes and what the new technologies offer for enhanced communication, interaction of large numbers of people and stimulating the political process. This he describes as "postmodern librarianship." Readers who currently participate in this dynamic era of great change in libraries, are likely to be bored with this volume, but the broader community of readers will find it to con-

continued on page 34

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Op-Ed from page 32

tain good history, and trend-setting of where libraries have been and what directions they are taking.

Gordon Graham has created a single theme issue of *LOGOS* (volume #7, #1, 1996) on the "Book in the United States Today". This ambitious collection of 20 papers by many leaders in the library and publishing industries and edited by **Richard Abel** covers reflections on the range of American publishing today. We learn about religious publishing, juvenile literature, textbooks, online and Internet products used in schools and by end users, the paperback era, distribution and sale of books to libraries and bookstores, the role of the book club, what distinguishes reference and medical publishing from other types, the specifics of scholarly publishing and we get an overview of electronic publishing with special focus on journals and serials and the changes in libraries to accommodate new formats and technologies. This is a wonderful read — a compendium of contributions by the leaders of this generation involved in publishing and making books available to readers in schools, libraries of all kinds, and the bookstore. In the postscript, Graham alludes to all that is missing from this volume — yes, no paper is included about the author, editor, translator, designer or illustrator; but still it captures a very sentimental spirit as it recaps how the book and journal got

to be where they are today. With so many changes in how we create information, channel it, distribute it, sell it, preserve it, manipulate it, this volume reminds us of all the steps we as librarians and publishers have taken independently and together to work in this new electronic arena and it is our collective wisdom and ideas that keep us busy and active.


These three works are all different but they weave very common themes and address many similar concerns and issues. Each predicts a very strong future for the book and publishing but cautions that institutions and readers alike will continue to develop a new mindset as we come to depend on information in different formats and release many more electronic products and watch the World Wide Web continue to develop. As Graham eloquently concludes, "...it became clear to me that the book and the non-book would cohabit. The author remained crucial; the publisher was still useful; and the library was still necessary. And now booksellers are seating their customers in front of terminals." Everyone interested in books, publishing, libraries and the acquisition and preservation of materials, will find each of these books good choices to read. We now look forward to the Autumn 1997 conference to be convened by the **Association of Research Libraries and the Association of American University Presses** to continue the dialog on the **Future of the Book**. 

Money Talks from page 20

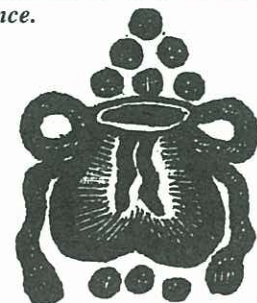
liaisons to the various departments. The next step is to convey the results with the department representatives and faculty. We will be sending a letter to the appropriate administrators describing the need for additional funds for selected new journals and the relatively small increase in allocation to the Library this would entail. The results of the survey allow us to better demonstrate the extent of the need for additional journals that would be used.

Longer-range plans include using the survey information (along with other data) to formulate a more formal policy for periodical collection development. We expect to expand the survey to other groups. We have already given the survey to new faculty starting September 1996 and approximately a quarter have responded to date. We would also like to survey graduate students. We also plan to ask faculty to update their list of "read" journals on a regular basis; part of this activity will involve trying to determine a method that is easy and does not consume much time, both on the part of the faculty member

completing it and on our part in tabulating the results and updating the database.

Along with the usage data we collected from the survey we would like to integrate data on pricing, holdings, format, citation analyses, indexing, circulation, and so on in a database that can be manipulated in any number of ways to help provide information to make informed choices about subscriptions, document delivery or other means of access. This would help us achieve one of our original (and loftiest) goals: the creation of what we like to call "the world's largest serials management database." We hope we can complete this before the year 3000. 

NB: This paper was adapted from a paper presented at the 1996 Charleston Conference.



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