Against the Grain

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People Profile: Vic Elliott

Editor

publishers and libraries was formed in 2006 to develop the concept. **LOCKSS** remains the software platform, at the core of the network, but the business model is quite different in several important respects.

CLOCKSS is indisputably a dark archive. Decisions on whether to provide access to archival content, to open up part of the archive, are taken not by individual institutions but by the **CLOCKSS Board** itself. Such decisions will be prompted by major trigger events such as the corporate failure of a publisher, the catastrophic and sustained failure of a publisher's delivery platform, the cessation of publication of a particular title, or a publisher's decision no longer to offer back issues. And when access is opened to endangered content, that access is not limited to **CLOCKSS** participants, or to current or former subscribers to that licensed content, but to everyone throughout the world. In effect, the content is made available under open-access conditions.

The first of two such trigger events occurred in late 2007. It arose from the intention of **SAGE Publications** to discontinue the provision of online access to the journal *Graft: Organ and Cell Transplantation*. Following a decision by the **CLOCKSS Board**, the three volumes of *Graft* published by **SAGE** were copied from the seven archive nodes or servers within the pilot system and in early 2008 made available to the world free of charge through two hosting platforms at **Stanford** and **Edinburgh Universities**. Although the hosting platforms are strategically positioned, in the United States and Europe, access is available worldwide to either platform. The *Graft* (and subsequent *Auto/Biography*) experience is a good example of what can happen in the world of proprietary digital resources and a timely demonstration of the ability of e-archiving systems like **CLOCKSS** to respond effectively.

It would be wrong to see **CLOCKSS** as a successor to **LOCKSS**, as somehow superseding a precursor system. In fact, they are complementary systems. It is a matter of focus, a concentration in the case of **LOCKSS** on the local community, and in the case of **CLOCKSS**, on the global community. A reliance on **CLOCKSS** as the global archive of last resort does not preclude working with **LOCKSS** to meet local community archiving needs.

Why CLOCKSS?

The question whether or not to choose **CLOCKSS** is in some ways redundant. You don't choose **CLOCKSS**. It chooses you. For whether you support the initiative or not, it will be there to support you, should a trigger event occur and access to subscribed (or unsubscribed) scholarly content be denied. That this is so is evidenced by the *Graft* example or experience.

Perhaps I should try to answer a different question — why is my university willing to act as a host library, to operate a **CLOCKSS** box and seek to attract Australian and New Zealand content into the **CLOCKSS** dark archive?

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BORN & LIVED: New Zealand, United Kingdom, Australia.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER AND ACTIVITIES: Currently, Director, Scholarly Information Services and University Librarian, **The Australian National University**; member of the Steering Committee of the **Australian National Data Service (ANDS)**; a delegate for Asia Pacific on the **OCLC Members Council**; and a member of the **Board of CLOCKSS**. Previously, University Librarian, **University of Tasmania** (1998-2003) and University Librarian, **Victoria University of Wellington**, New Zealand (1986-1997). 🐦

The argument is philosophical and professional. In moving to a digital environment, libraries have largely outsourced the management and curation of electronic information resources to the content providers. The archiving of these same electronic resources offers us an opportunity to reclaim that role, not alone but in partnership with publishers. I for one am not willing to outsource that role again, to spurn the chance to exercise stewardship over critical information resources in the interests of our academic community. I didn't join the profession to be a retailer, a purveyor of commodities. And it does not appear to me to be in the interest of libraries in these professionally perilous times to abdicate the stewardship role when it lies there for the taking.

It seemed to me **CLOCKSS** offered us that rare chance, that unusual opportunity. It is a community-governed partnership in which libraries and publishers together determine strategy and policies within a transparent governance structure. We decide our own future — it is not decided for us.

The technology is proven. The risk management strategy is robust, and acceptable to both partner communities, libraries and publishers. And the geographical spread of host institutions ensures that the **CLOCKSS** archive will be representative of global scholarly output, not simply that of Europe and North America.

I can't resist adding that for someone like me, who after all these years remains uncomfortable with the idea that scholarly information should be traded as a commodity, the **CLOCKSS** policy that after a trigger event endangered content should be released to everyone, not simply current or former subscribers, is a return to reason and sane public policy.

It is evident that the case for **CLOCKSS** is rapidly gaining acceptance. In addition to the decision of the **Australian National University** to act as a **CLOCKSS** archive node, seven university libraries in Australia and three in New Zealand have signed supporting library agreements with effect from 2009. Given that collaborative electronic archiving within a community-governed partnership remains novel to many, this is an encouraging result. **CLOCKSS** is just one approach to electronic archiving but it is the approach to which my university is committed. For us, the case is conclusive. 🐦

Endnotes
1. **H.L. Mencken**, "The Divine Afflatus," *A Mencken Chrestomathy* (New York: **Alfred A. Knopf**, 1953), p. 443.
2. **Jacques Derrida**, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. **Eric Prenowitz** (Chicago, **University of Chicago Press**, 1996), p. 11.
3. **Thomas Jefferson** to **Ebenezer Hazard**, February 18, 1791 in *Thomas Jefferson, Writings: Autobiography, Notes on the State of Virginia, Public and Private Papers, Addresses, Letters*, edited by **Merrill D. Peterson** (New York: **Library of America**, 1984).

At **ALA** in Denver, I also attended the **Technical Services Managers in Academic Libraries Interest Group** discussion early on Saturday morning. Most of the discussions focused on **budgeting**, **staffing** and **cataloging** issues. Participants compared experiences with staffing cuts, reassigning staff as library priorities change or staffing is cut, the necessity for layoffs or furloughs and other budgeting and staffing issues.

serials.infomotions.com/ngc4lib/ archive/2009/200901/0006.html