November 1997

Back Talk-Gear Shifter or Cogs in the Gears?

Anthony W. Ferguson
Columbia University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ferguson, Anthony W. (1997) "Back Talk-Gear Shifter or Cogs in the Gears?," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 9: Iss. 5, Article 12.
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2914>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Chaos

from page 92

complete unit, the Object can be used by your computer without pre-arrangement. For a look at these concepts in more detail, I urge you to spend a few minutes on the Web. Go to <<http://www.disa.org>> (DISA, the Data Interchange Standards Organization, is Secretariat to the U.S. EDI standards development group). Once there, you are given the option to look at some of the committee activity. Select the Strategic Implementation Task Force (SITG) and take a look at the UN and ISO/IEC documents on file there. AND, if you find yourself thinking that you can help this effort and make it work more appropriately for your organization or community, get involved. Contact BISAC or SISAC at the addresses elsewhere in this article and volunteer. We can use all the help we can get if we're going to get in right in the next century!!

Back to the Future

from page 85

tutions, but for future generations as well. Thus, expending capital on information as though it were merely a utility is onerous. On the other hand, if reliance on per-use fees for low impact information allows more selective capital investments in high impact information, then my instincts as a collections person might be satisfied. The expansion of reliance on per-use fees might accelerate the market correction we at HighWire are involved with as well.

20. After two years into the project what has surprised you? Any profound lessons? Have your goals changed?

MK: The enthusiasm for the online versions by readers has surprised us. The warmth and strength of our relationships with our co-publishers has been a wonderful surprise. The examples of the *JBC* and *Science* have been mentioned only and are quite pervasive ones, but the other relationships with the other publishers have been wonderful and quite productive as well. The most profound lesson to date is that HighWire demonstrates what a small, but brilliant band of professionals can do to affect change given the focus on the mission, on satisfying authors, editors, readers, publishers using information technology. Our goals have not changed, though our methods and technologies have.

21. Would you like to add anything?

MK: I can promise only that the future will bring as many opportunities and changes as the recent past. Not only HighWire, but Stanford in general seeks to exploit the opportunities to the advantage of its academic community and for the colleague communities elsewhere. Get more information about HighWire at <http://highwire.stanford.edu/>.

Copyright 1997 by Michael A. Keller. Licensed for print and digital publication to *Against the Grain* by Michael A. Keller.

Innovation Affecting Us

from page 89

Popular report options include: items selected but not yet ordered, recently shipped items, approval plan activity report sorted by fund code. Reports can be created, viewed online and printed or (if too long) attached to emails. For collection development purposes, records display global title histories showing how many customers received the book on approval, compared to customers who received only notification slips for that title.

GOBILink, used in conjunction with GOBI, can create bibliographic and order records in a local library system from orders entered into GOBI, eliminating the need to re-key item-by-item. Libraries can down-

load data which will trigger encumbrance, order, receipt and payment transactions in the local library system.

For cataloging support, **GOBILink** can facilitate the overlay of order-level records with cataloging records directly from YBP or through **OCLC PromptCat**. GOBI ordering screens provide space for libraries to communicate local data to be included in the cataloging fields. YBP is beta-testing shelf-ready materials for libraries with call numbers provided by OCLC via PromptCat.

Available since January 1996, GOBI continues to evolve and a list of enhancement ideas appear on the Website. A picture of GOBI (bird) and imaginative description also appears on the Website, adding a sense of humor to the electronic environment.

Back Talk

from page 94

them, causing all sorts of troubles. and yet, it is in the future where our greatest leverage is. We can't change the past, although if we are smart, we learn from it. ... If we learn to anticipate the future better, we need not fear it. In fact, we can welcome it, embrace it, prepare for its coming, because most of it will be the direct outgrowth of our own efforts." (p. 18).

The proponents of the Yale classical curriculum were able to hide behind its historical legitimacy. Are we hiding behind the historical legitimacy of print research? Me?

I am good at attacking digital foolishness: I mouth the "you can't read a computer in the bathtub or bed" clichés. But do any of us really believe that this steady growth in the amounts spent on electronic resources is going to end or even slow down? Do we really think the generation of kids flocking to the Internet (whose fragile minds I worried about in a previous column) are going to reverse direction? So are we the people shifting the gears from how information is acquired, processed, stored and preserved now to how it will be done in the future? Or are we some loose nuts and bolts in the gears, trying to stop or slow down the process?

ADVERTISERS' INDEX

13 ACADEMIC PRESS	11 CARL CORP.	95 JAEGER GLOBAL ENT.
87 ACCENTS	38 CASALINI LIBRI	40 KLUWER
2 ALFRED JAEGER	73 CHADWYCK-HEALEY	89 MAJORS
67 AMBASSADOR	83 COGNIZANT COMMUNICATIONS	9 MCGRAW HILL
81 AM. CHEMICAL SOCIETY	91 COUTTS	96 MIDWEST LIBRARY
53 AM. INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS	48 DICTIONARY OF ART	62 MARTINUS NIJHOFF
76 AM. MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY	65 DOODY'S REVIEW SERVICE	51 PUVILL
33 AMIGOS	33 EASTERN BOOK	31 READMORE
35 ANNUAL REVIEWS	27 EBSCO INFO. SERVICES	47 RHODE ISLAND LAW PRESS
39 ASHGATE	55 EBSCO DOC	45 RICH, LLOYD
5 ATG	85 EMERY-PRATT	60 SCHOENHOF'S FOREIGN BKS.
58 AUX AMATEURS DE LIVRES	84 EUROPEAN BOOK CTR.	25 SPRINGER-VERLAG
7 BAKER & TAYLOR	57 FAXON	21 SWETS
3 BLACKWELL'S	63 G & L WISSENSCHAFTLICHE	17 WILEY
43 BLACKWELL'S	59 HENRY HOLT	23 WILEY
69 BOOK HOUSE	15 INFORMATION QUEST	19 YBP
77 BOWKER	75 INSTITUTE FOR SCIENTIFIC INFO.	
71 BRODART	29 INSTITUTE OF PHYSICS	

Ads Manager: Edna Laughrey Internet: elaughrey@aol.com
phone: 313-429-1029, fax: 313-429-1711

Back Talk — Gear Shifter or Cogs in the Gears?

by **Anthony W. Ferguson** <ferguson@columbia.edu> Tel. 212-854-7401

A great little book, that every librarian should read, is *Paradigms: The Business of Discovering the Future* by **Joel Arthur Barker**. It is about paradigms or the fundamental rules of how things are done or even what is doable. Barker discusses some of the paradigm shifts that have taken place and talks about paradigm "shifters," that is, the people who move us from one way of thinking and doing to the new way of thinking and doing. I began to wonder the other day if we librarians are the people shifting the gears from how information is acquired, processed, stored and preserved now, to how it will be done in the future? Or are we some loose nuts and bolts in the gears, trying to stop or slow down the process?

Two events led me to these self-deprecating set of doubts. First, I was reading about one of the great events in the history of American higher education: **The Yale Report of 1828** which defended the classical curriculum. Second, I attended a meeting of the **New York Comprehensive Research Libraries** where an education professor and some of his prize students from **Columbia University** discussed efforts to take the Internet to the suburban schools north of Manhattan, to create digital libraries, and to get teachers to integrate these resources in the curriculum. The Yale report was a successful campaign to turn back the barbarians who wanted to discard the study of Greek and Latin, in favor of an elective system permitting students to study practical things like business, chemistry or even French. The Yale report was written by its president and a number of professors who had a vested interest in keeping things the way they were. Their students memorized, recited and discussed the classics and got a quick overview of the rest of the world's knowledge. The intent was to not only learn Latin and Greek but to internalize the moral and ethical stances discussed in these texts. The intent was to turn out gentlemen who would employ their wealth in behalf of society. The intent was to give each young man a "liberal education." This was the curriculum employed in the education of most of America's early leaders.

Opposing the writers of the Yale Report were those who claimed that the Americans then beginning to settle the West needed more than Greek and Roman philosophy. Some of these reformers were college presidents who attempted to change things at **Harvard, Brown and Dartmouth**. What they wanted to do was shift the paradigm, to change from the broad-based liberal education system favored at Yale to a system that produced skilled businessmen, engineers and manufacturers. Given the practical nature of most Americans, one might think this would have been a no-brainer. The opponents of the Yale report should have won. Surely everyone would recognize that

America's colleges should train surveyors, businessmen, veterinarians and engineers instead of gentlemen who could quote **Plato** in the original Greek. Wrong! Instead most of the barbarians were shoved back out the gates of higher education for another 75 years.

This is where we librarians come in. Not that we even thought of much in 1828, but by analogy, we seem to be acting a lot like the Yale professors of 1828. We believe in the old ways of doing research to the extent that we marginalize the value of what is out there on the Net. It is fun but not to be relied upon. We do this to justify our current and past courses of action.

The defenders of the classics had to demonstrate their study was legitimate. They had to show that memorizing Greek and Latin texts was practical. Another no-brainer, right? Wrong again! At the time, people believed in the concept of "faculty psychology" — that is, the belief that the brain is like any muscle, the more it is exercised, the stronger it gets. The stronger the brain, that is the stronger the ability to think critically, the more successful the person will be in life. And nothing exercises the brain like memorizing the classics, reciting them, debating them, and discussing them. Anything that difficult and boring must be good for you. So Yale proposed to be (continue to be) a sort of cerebral boot camp where young men were taught to analyze a situation, to determine what the important variables were, to determine the best decision and then communicate the decision using their finely-honed rhetorical skills — all done using the Greek and Roman classics as the foundation of their education.

The parents of these budding captains of government and industry wanted their sons to be groomed for success just like the leaders of that day

had been trained. The teachers wanted to keep doing what they were doing. So the two forces aligned together and the classical curriculum reigned until it became very evident to everyone that students could exercise their brains studying practical subjects and the professors decided it was more fun studying, researching and teaching their specialties than force feeding the classics. The students replied to all of this in the same way they respond to situations today when they realize they have no choice in the matter, "whatever."

Are we librarians like the Yale professors? It is ironic that the most wired humanities professors on most campuses are the classicists. Once burned, twice learned? The printed word is how we and most of our patrons learned things, so it is of course how people will continue to learn things. Right or wrong again? In our paradigm, research is done employing sophisticated abstracting and indexing tools, catalogs, books and journals. No matter that the publishing industry is killing the golden geese (libraries), we must defend the print industry in whose coils we are tightly held — to our last gasp. No matter that the bibliographic control systems we invented with devotion and our whole service industry costs triple to quadruple the amount spent on content we acquire, we must defend these rules, regulations and roles to the end.

So where do the education professor and his digital libraries come in? As he and his students spoke about their digital libraries, I was struck by how small a role commercial information played in their scheme of things. Oh, they were going to spend money, I believe he recently got a seven million dollar grant to

develop his concept. But his vision or paradigm of our informational future seemed to employ digital hunters and gatherers

instead of librarians. There is all this "free" information out there and they plan to gather it up, develop lesson plans around it, conduct workshops, and otherwise get people to take advantage of all this information. Uhhgg!!

As I sat there listening to these digital Jacks and Jills, I began to wonder if they were the equivalent to the opponents to the Yale Report and I was a Yale classics professor scheming how to repack my product to make it relevant to the current and future generation. Lest I leave you with the view that all is lost, let me quote briefly from Barker's book:

"Most people know the future only as a place that is always robbing them of their security, breaking promises, changing the rules on

continued on page 93

Box Facts excerpted from Nat Bodian's The Joy of Publishing, available from Open Horizons Publishing Co., PO Box 205, Fairfield, Iowa 52556 at \$29.95.