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Other Side of the Street — A Response to Peter Givler's "Point of View" (Nov. 22, 1999)

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Metaphor has a great way of decoding a writer's stance. As a university press director and an AAUP member, I was overcome with images of the crusades and knights as I read **Peter Givler's**, *Scholarly Books, the Coin of the Realm of Knowledge*. (The title would have been better displayed as *Scholarly Books, Coins of the Realm of Knowledge* or *The Scholarly Book, Coin of the Realm of Knowledge*.) I was struck by the reliance on the past — the coin, the bulwark, the familiar, the book — as opposed to the future — electronic cash, the multi-use facility, the unfamiliar, the digital collection. Let me put my metaphor front and center — the e-revolution is not coming; it is here.

I respect **Mr. Givler's** position. Surely economics is a key factor in the scholarly process, but throwing coins at problems enables inefficient and outdated practices to continue. Between 1987 and 1998, university press book sales increased by 56%. Only adult paperback and juvenile hardbound sales increased at a greater rate, 62% and 71% respectively. In 1998, the average net sale on a university press volume was \$21.18. Since others in the publishing industry were not shutting down their businesses, what scenarios were sounding widespread alarms in the distribution of scholarly information?

True, vaccines against technology costs were not available over the last decade. To keep up with the rapidly exploding flow of information, companies were impelled to buy computers, open up their information databases, retrain or replace their staffs, and merge their capabilities with like-minded organizations. Publishing companies began a series of mergers and acquisitions during this time to increase productivity and create leaner organizations. University Presses, on the other hand, weren't as effective in reorganizing themselves. Even library communities built consortia, limited in some cases, to maximize resource use. Presses had opportunities to consolidate some tasks, marketing and distribution, for example, but were not as willing or interested in creating economies of scale. Although new scholarly information networks were growing, due to a lack of funding or foresight, presses failed to take leadership roles on their campuses to usher in this new era.

Perhaps, in the next decade, the paperback book could become an economical option, a great thing to have and read at any place and anytime with an appropriate light source. However, this does not lead to the conclusion that the book is and will be the cornerstone of scholarly communication. Quite the opposite, the new arrivals of scholarly information sources with their myriad of searching capabilities has given faculty an advantage that they did not have previously. Once the viability of a research source is proven, older methods of investigation became less appealing. Between 1989 and 1993 computer use at all levels of education increased from 46% to 59%. In a recent poll, 81% of the respondents said that they use a computer at home, work or school. Scholarly culture with its unique reading and research habits does not mirror the leisure reading habits of the general public. This differentiation must be accounted for prior to making sweeping generalizations about scholarly communication realities.

Already, we are seeing a move to larger containers of information, Web sites (for example, the Victorian Web, <http://landow.stg.brown.edu/victorian/victov.html>), as the environment that contains the compendium on a given topic. With the advent of e-tags (small, cheap chips that can be inserted in almost any product and are then readable by electronic devices attached to computers), outlines or executive summaries of scholarly research can be distributed in very compact formats that will allow linking with Web sites and other documents associated with the research. Entire revisions of works and the resulting updating of information will be able to be carried out in cyberspace.

Excursions to Los Angeles for the **Book Exhibit of America** and Frankfurt for the **Frankfurt Book Fair** would have provided considerable evidence that electronic publications were making significant advances in all markets. Yes, there had been previous talk about the issues surrounding the

move to digitization, but the most recent efforts (among them the **Microsoft Reader**, **NetLibrary.com**, etc.) are different because the players in the field seem to have the needed resources to bring significant progress to the electronic information frontier. Publishers are finally realizing that as the Internet market matures, more revenue connections will be available.

The linearity of the book has always been a comfortable educational pillow. Reading material from front to back along a numbered path mimics the Newtonian cause-and-effect *Weltanschauung*. Unfortunately, multi-tasking processes of present undergraduates and their successors will bring changes in the way in which we deal with teaching and distributing information. We have finally caught up with the Einsteinian principle of relativity.

Knowledge is the current position of various theories in space. Since we have the tools, we can alter these knowledge points and make our research even more robust and vibrant. Newtonian frameworks narrowed our vision about indirect consequences of our investigations. Einstein's relativity

inspires more interdisciplinary research and results.

A distinct and problematic concern for e-publication consumers is a lack of standards in the way materials are presented. Books have always been quite easy to recognize across cultures and languages. E-publications, however, come with varied interfaces and searching parameters. A common portal, through which motley arrays of information could be funneled, would give the user more confidence in the materials behind the access utility. New standards, customers' demands, and technology advances should lead to a better container for e-information.

The book, with its long research cycle, long writing cycle and long publishing cycle, does not lend itself to today's educational milieu in all fields. The rapidly changing areas of scientific and business research require quick information turnaround cycles while humanities and the social sciences are able to

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withstand longer development and publishing paths. While not diminishing the scholarly vitality of these fields, the collection of metaphors that faculty in these areas use to talk about their disciplines is different and has a significant effect on how educators in these "fuzzy" areas view scholarly communication. Longer treatises with significant academic apparatus are expected to be part of the package that tenure candidates bring to the table. The norm in these areas is reflected by the painstakingly long hours of research spent alone over stacks of books. The educational fodder of these areas is the past. What more is there to discover about Plato unless something old is found and brought into the present, introduced into a fixed system, to cause reevaluation and review and hopefully some chaos? Yet, the world is a richer educational agora because Platonic study is extremely important.

Vacuums are wonderful devices to clean the carpet, but they hardly provide the best surrounding for inspired research. Genius necessitates a thorough understanding of the current parameters of a given field. Genius also requires a Kierkegaardian "leap of faith" to a new framework. The e-revolution allows for a quicker, cooperative, and

more global way in which to conduct investigation. Just as the electronic market is putting pressure on manufacturers to unify pricing (due to the ease of checking prices across internet time and space), the electronic scholarly community will put pressure on researchers to take into account a much larger information view before dispensing results.

The book should not stand as a bulwark against progress in an area, scholarly com-

munication, where change is the norm and innovation the key to educational development. The next several years will bring new challenges and opportunities. A recent grant by the **Mellon Foundation** provides the capital for a reevaluation of scholarly communication and the university press. The timing could not be better. We must get ourselves out of the current information container before we find out that it's been closed for the good of all.

Bestsellers in Anatomy & Physiology from page 61

Fundamentals Of Neural Network Modeling: Neuropsychology And Cognitive Neuroscience; Ed. By Randolph W. Parks. Mit Press 1998 \$60.00 Cloth 0262161753

Biochemistry Of Exercise X; Ed. By Mark Hargreaves. Human Kinetics 1999 \$60.00 Cloth 0880117583

Redish, A. David. *Beyond The Cognitive Map: From Place Cells To Episodic Memory*. MIT Press 1999 \$45.00 Cloth 0262181940

Sellers, James. *Myosins*. Oxford Univ Press 1999 \$50.00 Paper 0198505094

Carlino, Andrea, 1960- *Books Of The Body: Anatomical Ritual And Renaissance Learning*;

Trans. By John Tedeschi. Univ Of Chicago 1999 \$29.00 Cloth 0226092879

Where Biology Meets Psychology; Ed. By Valerie Gray Hardcastle. MIT Press 1999 \$55.00 Cloth 0262082764

Masoro, Edward J. *Challenges Of Biological Aging*. Springer Publishing 1999 \$38.95 Cloth 0826112773

Friebolin, Horst. *Basic One- And Two-dimensional NMR Spectroscopy*. Wiley-vch 1998 \$59.95 Paper 3527295135

Introduction To Cellular Signal Transduction; Ed. By Ari Sitaramayya. Birkhauser 1999 \$75.00 Cloth 0817639829

Traub, Roger D. *Fast Oscillations In Cortical Circuits*. MIT Press 1999 \$50.00 Cloth 0262201186