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Back Talk -- In the X Movie

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I Hear the Train A Comin' from page 92

formative device. Let's revisit this at the **2009 Charleston Conference**.

"The ghost of beauty, the ghost of stateliness, the ghost of elegance, the ghost of pride, the ghost of frivolity, the ghost of wit, the ghost of youth, the ghost of age, all waiting their dismissal from the desolate shore..."

To the aforementioned university press. For many years, the university press imprimatur has connoted quality and intellectual vibrancy. The effects of the scholarly communication crisis have been keenly felt by this group over the past two decades. Monographs continue to struggle finding a place within library budgets, as do, increasingly, print books in general. Marketing dollars are scarce, and fixed costs are nontrivial. However, we can clearly observe pockets of innovation emerging over the past few years. **Rice University** has revived its press in digital only mode, relying on low-cost print-on-demand for those who want hard copy. **Columbia University Press** has teamed with the library and the IT department to co-found **Electronic Publishing Initiative at Columbia (EPIC)**. EPIC's goal — to create new kinds of scholarly and educational publications through the use of new media technologies — has already resulted in the development of the **Columbia International Affairs Online** and **Earthscape** platforms. **Penn State Press** and the **University Libraries** have partnered on an **Office of Digital Scholarly Publishing** to recognize efficiencies on project management, budgeting, and opportunity evaluation. Will these types of experiments reinvigorate the category? Or is the venerable institution truly in danger of joining **Dickens'** ghosts on the desolate shore?

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adoption. There certainly will be more to watch in the coming months related to **OOXML**.

There are numerous ways that community members may participate in the international standards development process. Although there is an added level of logistical challenges when participating at this level, it can be a truly rewarding experience. Not only is this a great opportunity to interact with colleagues internationally and experience their culture, it is also an opportunity to help shape the future directions of information exchange. If you are interested in engaging more directly in international standardization, please contact the **NISO** offices at nisohq@niso.org. 🍷

Endnotes

1. Contrary to popular belief, **ISO** is not an acronym for the name in a different language. Because the organization name would have different acronyms for each language, the short name of **ISO** was chosen — derived from the Greek *isos*, meaning "equal" — to be the all-purpose name in any language.

"... tell Wind and Fire where to stop," returned madame; "but don't tell me."

The Wind and the Fire might be told where to stop, but international scientific collaboration is another matter. As I mentioned in a recent *Train* column, China is growing as both a creator and consumer of scholarly content. The supporting data are in some ways staggering. To briefly recap, China's **GDP** investment in research and development will grow from around 1% earlier this decade to 2.5% in 2020. Higher education enrollment has increased more than five-fold since 1996. China had a 20-fold increase in publications in international scientific journals from 1981 to 2003. The other BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China) are similarly emerging as important actors within the academic research system. However, legal restrictions, particularly within the United States, have limited the scope of collaboration between domestic and international scientists. Laws limit the extent to which federal funds can be shared with foreign collaborators. Visas regulations restrict face-to-face interaction among international team members. Espionage concerns cabin off dual-use equipment that might speed diffuse research efforts. While the protection of taxpayer resources and state secrets are principles that should not be taken lightly, several efforts are underway to loosen these restrictions in the name of scientific advancement. One notable example is the **American Association for the Advancement of Science's** recently launched **Center for Science Diplomacy** (see <http://diplomacy.aaas.org/>). In an era where connectivity and connectedness are increasingly the norm, one suspects that the impediments to international scientific collaboration will be eroded and perhaps overrun in the coming years.

"You anticipate what I would say, though you cannot know how earnestly I say it, how earnestly I feel it, without knowing my secret heart, and the hopes and fears and anxieties with which it has long been laden."

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Amazon could be the collector of university presses? Were this to happen, the effects of the

POD butterfly might not end here. With **Amazon** involved, what will happen to academic book vendors? Maybe **Amazon** could buy one or more of approval vendors and simplify the whole process. We live in interesting times. Watch out for butterflies! 🦋

Endnotes

1. "Bound." (June 5, 2008). *The Economist*. [Electronic Version]. Retrieved July 23, 2008 from http://www.economist.com/business/displaystory.cfm?story_id=11504752.
2. Jones, Philip. (May 27, 2008). Bowker reports huge US p.o.d. surge. *Bookseller.com*. Retrieved July 23, 2008 from <http://www.thebookseller.com/news/59802-bowker-reports-huge-us-pod-surge.html>.
3. Tetreault, Melissa. (March 2008). Short run books: "Digital printers offer runs of one to many." **Digital Publishing Solutions**. Retrieved July 23, 2008 from <http://www.dpsmagazine.com/content/ContentCT.asp?P=383>.
4. Bacher, Thomas. (July 31, 2007). *Rice E Press. Inside Higher ED*. Retrieved July 23, 2008 from <http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2007/07/31/ricepress>.

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To the notion of social networks. I have had at least a dozen clients in the past year for which Web 2.0 strategies were a key concern, so I must be careful not to bite the hand that at least has a hand in feeding me. Having said that, the ever-increasing immediacy and intimacy of communication may be reaching its terminus. From blogs to **MySpace** to **Facebook** to **Twitter**, we are now looped into the most evanescent of moods, thoughts, and ruminations. The borders between personal and professional, profound and piffling, insight and inanity have never been blurrier. How do these networks influence the way scholars interact? What efficiencies are created? What impact does the ability to be so wired into other people's thoughts and actions, and, in turn, to have other people so wired into yours, have on the exchange of ideas? Perhaps the **Charleston Conference** can help us untangle these issues and learn to cut through the cluttering aspects of social networks.

"It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done; it is a far, far better rest that I go to, than I have ever known."

This one is easy isn't it? What is better than strolling through the lobby of the **Francis Marion Hotel** in early November when the **Charleston Conference** is in session? Catching up with old friends. Exchanging ideas on the next big thing with colleagues. Holding court in an overstuffed armchair as a session ends and familiar faces pour out, enlightened and invigorated. And crashing into the hotel bed after a full day of intellectual stimulation, capped off by a fine southern meal. A far, far better thing indeed. See you in November. 🍷

Back Talk — In the X Movie

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In the movie, *Jurassic Park*, one of the characters talks about the so called chaos theory “butterfly effect” and how life is not as chaotic as it seems, but there are causes not always seen by those at the blunt end of the effect. I have often thought back to this fictional conversation: That a butterfly in the Amazon could with the flutter of its wings set in motion a change/trend in our interrelated ecosystem which is then experienced world-wide. I have found this interesting because I have wondered about the consequences of behaviors or developments we are observing today — are they butterflies or inconsequential moths?

Recently, at an **American Library Association** (Anaheim, CA 2008) panel on library public relations and fund raising, the experience of the **New York Public Library’s** exhibition of the print on demand **Espresso Book Machine** by **Lightning Source** was discussed. It set me to thinking about the butterfly effect and whether print on demand (POD) was another butterfly which would change that corner of the world inhabited by *Against the Grain* readers? Specifically, would POD change the publishing world totally forever? Would POD’s ability to cost effectively generate a few hundred copies of X title super fast cause the demise of university presses, for example, which volume wise, seem to be the specialists at this level of non-fiction publishing.

We have, at the reading consumer’s end of the information chain, of course long had photocopying as a sort of POD option. In the ink on paper world, readers have printed what they wanted/demanded by pumping sufficient dimes into a photocopying machine to purchase that segment of a journal or book which they needed to fulfill their information needs. In the land of full text electronic information, photocopy POD has been replaced

by USB memory sticks, hard discs, and/or the ability to save as much as we want and to email it to ourselves for later consumption. While some publishers seem obsessed with limiting the amount of text that can be easily saved for later reading, in general, photocopyers and personal electronic memory devices have not changed the publishing landscape: readers still need a range of publishers to publish interesting books and journals to do their part before readers can grab that part of what is published to meet their research/information needs.

Some publishers themselves have long employed a range of alternatives to 20th century typesetting to produce books. The technology of printing has been in continuous change and evolution since the advent of woodblock printing nearly 2,000 years ago. But POD is more than changing the technology with which ink is put on paper; the magic of POD — if it exists — is the speed with which it can help information providers meet the demands of readers. The kind of speed with which an **Espresso Book Machine** can churn out a book is very impressive. I have tried to imagine what it would be like for someone like me in Hong Kong to be able to go to a bookshop, or my library lobby, and select what book I want and then be able to pick it up a half hour or so later.

But my wanting to get instant gratification is at the consumer’s end of the information chain. In the publishers’ segment of the process, POD is already beginning to shake things up. In a recent *Economist* article it was noted that “**Stephen DeForge** of **Ames On-Demand** says his POD business, which specializes in printing small runs of customised books for schools and universities, has been growing by 45% a year since 2001. Last year his firm printed more than 800,000 books in runs as

small as ten copies at a time.”¹ In that same article, the impact of **Amazon’s** use of POD was also highlighted: “In March **Amazon** announced that it would require all the POD books it sells to be printed by the company at its warehouses. **Mr Bezos** [**Amazon’s** founder and chief executive] says that this enables **Amazon** to have a book ready to ship within two hours of an order being placed online. Between POD and the **Kindle** [also discussed in this article], **Mr Bezos** thinks he can sell ‘any book ever printed in any language.’”

In a similar vein, a recent news story reported in *The Bookseller.com* noted that while “Publishing output in the US grew only slightly in 2007, according to the US bibliographic provider **Bowker**, there was a “staggering rise” in the number of print-on-demand titles published with **Bowker** now reporting these books separately.”² This article quoted **Kelly Gallagher** of **Bowker** saying that “The most startling development last year is the reporting of ‘On Demand’ [p.o.d.] titles, leading to a stunning five-fold increase of new titles in the unclassified category, which mostly consists of reprints of public domain titles and other short-run books.”

It is intriguing to think about the potential side effects of short run publishing. **Melissa Tet-reault** of **Digital Publishing Solutions** indicated that “Statistics from **InfoTrends, Inc.**, show that short run printing is the way of the future. Runs of 250 to 499 are seeing a 40 percent increase in print frequency, as opposed to runs of 50,000 plus, which are seeing a 44 percent decrease in frequency.”³ **Thomas Bacher**, in a comment regarding the revival of the **Rice University Press** which is using short run printing, indicated that “Many presses now print first runs of less than 150 copies, make print-on-demand an option and sell eBooks.”⁴ His point was university presses, many of which would have died out long ago without direct or indirect subsidies from their host institutions, could survive employing short runs. But I wonder what is to prevent commercial presses from simply expanding their purview into the narrow interest academic book business previously dominated by university presses.

Previously, an author whose book would only be sold to a hundred or so academic libraries plus the same or less number of academics and students could only resort to a university press because commercial press runs had to be in the thousands of copies to break even. But now? I wonder whether or not a large commercial publisher couldn’t rely upon the same POD technology to make academic book publishing profitable. Such monographic publishers could then go around like major European periodicals publishers collecting university presses. Each of these university presses could reduce their staffs to one or two people to recruit manuscripts regionally and then all the rest of the work would be picked up by the “mother publisher” whose distribution channels are much more extensive than those enjoyed by university presses. Maybe

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