Bet You Missed It -- Press Clippings -- In the News -- Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths

Bruce Strauch

The Citadel

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

Part of the Library and Information Science Commons

Recommended Citation

Strauch, Bruce (2006) "Bet You Missed It -- Press Clippings -- In the News -- Selected by Your Crack Staff of News Sleuths," Against the Grain: Vol. 18: Iss. 4, Article 33.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.4940

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.
LET THEM EAT CAKE
—a novel by Tom Angus

A little learning is a dangerous thing and when combined with a lot of money it can be lethal. The once cozy world of scholarly publishing is now rocked by controversy. For more than three centuries scholars, publishers and librarians worked in harmony. Journals were affordable and science trusted. No longer. Librarians and publishers are at loggerheads and scholarship under pressure. The credibility of a system built up over hundreds of years has been brought to the verge of collapse within the space of a decade. Can publisher greed be the only cause? Or is too much money being thrown at too many researchers with too few original ideas? Will the Internet bring the whole edifice crashing down?

REVIEWS OF LET THEM EAT CAKE
"The story line is strong and grips....In particular there are some wonderful set pieces. ...Please may we have sequels or prequels?" — Anthony Watkinson, in Learned Publishing
"Tom Angus has created a set of characters that are second to none in their wild and offbeat eccentricities." — Jeff Foster, in Armchair Interviews

LET THEM EAT CAKE MAY BE ORDERED IN THE FOLLOWING WAYS:
1. From the Amazon online bookstore www.amazon.com
2. From the AuthorHouse online book shop www.authorhouse.com

Title: Let Them Eat Cake — a novel (January 2005)
Author: Tom Angus
I Hear the Train A Comin’ — Web 2.0

Column Editor: Greg Tananbaum <gtananbaum@gmail.com>

I remember when I made my first professional foray into the brave new world of Internet technologies. In the halcyon days of 2000, new paradigms and buzzwords were sprouting like mold in the basement utility sink. Cyberspace, eCommerce. Portals. B2B, P2P, and Z2Z (that last one is facetious, though, not surprising). A quick search reveals that z2z.com is a vessel for the hopes and dreams of the obscure Robert and James Zarywacz. In some ways, these terms were quite meaningful. They helped startup companies that sold fish food in bulk to other fish food companies raise $50 million. They formed the basis of virtually unintelligible conversations among vested twentysomethings in bars from San Francisco to London. More importantly, these terms eventually provided the basic lexicon for actual web services and interactions. I knew that the functional definitions had been distilled from the buzz when my mom engaged in a detailed explanation of her online Sopranos DVD purchase, liberally sprinkling in terms like eCommerce and secure connection. Just as Mom grew comfortable with enough with cyberspace to learn if Patsy Parisi would whack Tony to avenge her twin brother Philly Spoons’s gangland execution, we are confronted with a paradigm shift. It’s not about the Web any longer, we are told. Nope — today we must confront Web 2.0. Much like the gulf that divides B2B dog food and my mom’s DVD purchase on Amazon, we are again in a cycle through which catchily yet largely meaningless phrases will be winnowed away from durable, important concepts and functionality.

Let’s start with the term “Web 2.0” itself. What exactly does it mean? The phrase was coined by computer book mogul Tim O’Reilly in 2004. A quick look at O’Reilly’s explanation (see http://www.oreillynet.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html) yields more candy floss than steak. O’Reilly’s five page explanation is actually quite good, but I lost interest mid-page one when I read, “Web 2.0 doesn’t have a hard boundary, but rather, a gravitational core.” I did, however, read through the full treatise, and I think I came away with a fairly good sense of what is relevant for our scholarly communication solar system. Web 2.0 refers to the emerging practices and services that use the Internet as a platform for communal participation. The Web 2.0 movement signals an increasing collaboration among Internet users. People are sharing information, data, content, expertise, and opinions in a way that first generation static Websites could not accommodate. This sharing often takes the form of peer-to-peer communication, unvetted by any expert authority. Britannica Online is Web 1.0; Wikipedia is Web 2.0. The former is a top-down site in which information is disseminated from a team of experts, to be read by the general public. The latter is a grassroots site in which visitors are encouraged to add their own expertise to existing definitions.

Given this applied definition of Web 2.0, the next few years should herald the emergence of new forms of scholarly communication. In actuality, “new” is a poor choice of words. I often insert a cartoon in my canned PowerPoint presentations in which one caveman is nervously showing his cave drawing to another caveman. This was peer-to-peer communication in its earliest form, of course. Intervening events (humanoid evolution and the invention of the printing press, to name but two) changed the distribution of ideas. Today’s scholarly journal circulates one person’s work into the hands of many people. The one communicates with the many, but true feedback loops through which the many can communicate back to the one, and to each other, are rare. Though time and financial constraints are no doubt factors in the dearth of mass scale, real time print media forums, this tells only a partial story. The culture of academic information dissemination has not been particularly geared for this type of freewheeling exchange. The tweed jacketed professor who doles out pearls of wisdom in staid journals is a cliché for a reason. That professor is an expert in his or her field, however narrowly this field may be defined. No one knows exactly what that professor knows, and therefore any discussion and debate would necessarily involve substantial differences in weight class among the participants. This is a gross oversimplification, of course, but it helps explain the general reluctance with which the scholarly communication world has met the Web 2.0 movement.

Rereading the preceding paragraph, you will see that the first and last sentences are somewhat contradictory. The next few years will see the emergence of new forms of scholarly communication. I began, only to conclude that there has been resistance within our community to Web 2.0 concepts. I greatly suspect that this resistance is starting to give way. This is due to several factors. The technologies in question are becoming too widespread in other areas of the Web to ignore. Community rating systems and reader comments are ubiquitous on sites like Amazon. (I was particularly honored when rockstar26 said my humor book Atomic Wedgies, Wet Willies, and Other Acts of Roguery was “destined to be bathroom reading material for generations.”) Twelve year olds are running their own blogs. As these technologies have moved into the mainstream, their ease of use, ease of implementation, and cost of implementation have improved dramatically. Implementation becomes compelling at this conve

continued on page 93