

International Dateline — A View From Fiesole 2004

by **Anthony Watkinson** (Consultant, 14, Park Street, Bladon, Woodstock, Oxon, United Kingdom, OX20 1RW; Phone: +44 1993 811561; Fax: +44 1993 811067) <anthony.watkinson@btopenworld.com>

This is a personal view of the sixth meeting in the **Fiesole Collection Development Retreat** series. I was asked to write this piece immediately on my return from Italy but I missed the deadline. Since then the presentations, the program including the optional events and even the profiles have gone up on the site of **Casalini Libri** — see http://digital.casalini.it/retreat/retreat_2004.html. I no longer feel it would be either appropriate or necessary to give a run-down on each presentation. It seems to me that all presentations (however apparently unpromising) at any conference can yield something useful and relevant, which you can carry away. This was my experience at the **European University Institute** back in March but I am concentrating now on what I found especially important. Moreover, those who attend the mother meeting in Charleston in November will know that it is in the questions, in the talk around the coffee urns and at the receptions that the real insights are proffered. This is also the case with the retreats. I shall try to factor in these insights.

I like to look for a buzz-word, or overarching concept expressed in shorthand, and I shall nominate a primary and a secondary buzz-word in the course of this report.

What was more evident this year, than has been the case with the last few retreats, was the fact that many of those presenting actually spoke to the theme — *Crossing Boundaries: Collecting & Collaborating Globally*. In addition it was a genuinely international meeting with ten countries represented. Someone used the word “globality,” which showed lack of taste. Not only was Continental European thinking demonstrated at length but those from the Pacific Rim, from **Melbourne** to **Stanford**, also provided a different take from the standard mid-Atlantic consensus. Even the summing up by **Tony Ferguson** embodied to some extent the view of the world as seen from Hong Kong. He has actually provided a **Word** document (great) not just **PowerPoint** (not very useful) at http://digital.casalini.it/retreat/retreat_2004.html#ferguson. Readers can judge for themselves how well all of us in the information business (whether we recognise it as a business or not) measure up to our mission — and where China is going.

I nominate **Vision** as the primary Retreat buzz-word. Do we have it or do we not have it? It was my impression that librarians at least are a little uncertain. Have publishers and other intermediaries ever had a vision? They certainly miss out on the training in mission which library schools give. **David Worlock**, who is in the middle of advising the (UK) **House of Commons Select Committee on Science and Technology** in their current hearings and consideration of evidence, probed us all on **Open Access**. Does the movement represent the beginnings of a complete change in the paradigm or is it essentially a red herring? With publishers fairly quiet, **Michael Keller** and his team answered

emphatically in favour of the fish option. For them pricing by commercial publishers was still the enemy, the dragon to be conquered. **Alice Keller** (no relation) announced a conversation to doubt about **OA**. It was her general view that librarians did not have a vision any more. There were some speakers who spoke the **SPARC** but I do not think there were many of the truly faithful present. For the medium-term future, the favoured projection was a hybrid system, which sounds bad news for us all because it means that it will be more costly rather than less costly. The “genie is out of the bottle” (as one publisher put it) but perhaps only partly out. Pandora’s Box was not mentioned.

The official Vision part of the conference was in fact the so-called preconference. **Peter Boyce** is well qualified to pronounce on visionary matters. His URL (<http://www.aas.org/~pboyce>) demonstrated an impressive ability to look to the future. **Boyce** himself reminded us that **Google** opened in November 1998 and we have never been the same since. He pointed out too that the growth in bandwidth over the last five years has been much greater than we envisioned then. It is one legacy of the dot com bubble. **Peter** has discovered (see his URL) to his surprise younger astrophysicists are still printing out. When will this stop? He was pessimistic about how much we have control over developments, technical and others, which are generated by commercial sectors outside our control, sectors he broadly described by the name of a large corporation beginning with “D.” For once there was an excellent presentation on trends in the humanities, specifically history, by **Michael Grossberg**, the editor of the *American Historical Review*. To me developments in the humanities appear to be more like those in the sciences and medicine than is often stated. He told us about a whole tranche of visionary developments involving books and journals. *AHR* is encouraging multi-media components in articles. Some costs come out of the surplus from subscriptions. Sustainability is a problem in this sector also.

The presentations by **Phil Davis**, **Michael Mabe** and **Carol Tenopir** demonstrated that, although the number of people doing serious work on what authors actually do and want is limited, our understanding through the research of a small but highly serious group is gradually growing. Much of this gradual illumination has occurred in Charleston publications or at Charleston occasions. **Phil’s** aim

at using statistics to help predict use will be of special interest to librarians and those looking for help in understanding the rather fearsome slides on the **Casalini** site will find a more appropriate version at <http://www.people.cornell.edu/pages/pmd8/>.

Richard Boulderstone is the man at the **British Library** who holds the crystal ball. He has an outcome-based vision. This was a rather different **British Library** presentation and presented some brave views of trends, for example in **STM** publishing. There were a lot of facts. It is interesting that he devoted a whole slide to security issues. **SPAM** represents 50% of all email and virus attacks are increasing. He laid some emphasis on the importance of community-based approaches and solutions. Publishers tend to think of the individual author writing the individual article as the model for the progression of general knowledge. Of particular interest was the place he gave to groupware. See <http://sval.org/~grantbow/groupware.html>. Is this the perspective of a computer science buff or do we see on sites like this the tools that scientists will routinely use in the future?

For me, by far, the most important presentation was that by **Deanna Marcum**, now Associate Librarian at the **Library of Congress**. Her basic thesis is a troubling one. It is that the restrictions imposed by the licenses enforced by publishers are preventing preservation of e-content for posterity. It is interesting that the dinner speech by **Michael Keller** touched on the same theme. It could be argued that publishers are in a defensive posture at present (because of the **OA** movement and the associated attacks on their role) and it could be that this defensiveness prevents them from taken up challenges thrown out to them. **Deanna** produces the challenge in the nicest possible way. She has also had the decency on this occasion to give posterity a **Word** file rather than a **PowerPoint** presentation so all **ATG** readers can read with pleasure her excellent prose. Do not be put off by the title — **The DODL**, the **NDIIP**, and the **Copyright Conundrum**. The acronyms are very nasty but they are all explained.

I nominate the secondary Retreat buzz-word as **Collaboration**. My reading of the vision produced by **Deanna** is that future success depends on vision across the information chain. I think our future success as intermediaries involve a similar approach. There were good presentations on collaboration among libraries, which were useful in their own terms, but only go so far.

