

# Books, Publishing, Libraries in the Information Age

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## **Books, Publishing, Libraries: A 1984 Analysis**

### *The State of Library/Publishing Cooperation*

THREE YEARS AGO an able editor from Knowledge Industry Publications who was concerned about changes in communication and cooperation among publishers and librarians proposed that I write or edit a book on the past and present of such ventures, but especially on their future. Since I worked for many years in publishing in the school and library market, and since I had related responsibilities when I worked for Dan Lacy, then director of the American Book Publishers Council (now the Association of American Publishers) I sought his advice and participation.

Both of us were interested in the topic, and both of us talked with a number of leaders in the library field to determine whether there was a market for such a book. Regretfully, we had to confess that while we might do the writing, it seemed that few planned to do the reading, so we abandoned the project. (A personal note: Were I ever to write that or any other book about publishing, it would be dedicated to Dan Lacy. His capacity to think about the history of book publishing and libraries, to analyze ideas, and to pass them on to an audience has made thousands upon thousands of people aware of the continuing symbiotic relationship between these two professions [and as Mr. Lacy practices it, publishing *is* a profession]. One will not fly while the other stumbles and

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falls. The quality of his mind and the generosity of his spirit are attested to in virtually all serious publications about information, book publishing and libraries. He seems able, always, to find the statesmanlike approach to a challenge.)

In the three intervening years, concern about the state of publishing and libraries has been considered in a number of books and articles. A sampling of those I turned to in writing this piece are: (1) *The Micro Millenium* by Christopher Evans, (2) *Books, Libraries, and Electronics: Essays on the Future of Written Communications* by Sigel et al, (3) *In Cold Type: Overcoming the Book Crisis* by Leonard Shatzkin, (4) Part I ("The Impact of New Technologies") and Part II ("The Changing Role of Reading") of the Unesco study of the *Future of the Book*, (5) *The 1983 Consumer Research Study on Reading and Book Purchasing* of the Book Industry Study Group, (6) "Reading: Old and New," the Winter 1983 issue of *Daedalus*, and (7) my notes from the March 1984 meeting of the advisory committee of the study of the role of the book in the future.<sup>1</sup> Undertaken by the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress, the report on the Library of Congress study will be presented in two parts: a brief overview for the general reader (December 1984) and a resource volume of pertinent data and documents and a bibliography.

Other than Mr. Orwell's prophecy of bookless homes with huge television screens, what has prompted this attention to books and publishing and the interplay among the kinds of media in the library market? Concern everywhere about change, insecurity and the disappearance of old lines of demarcation and the lack of new ones. While the number of dollars flowing into book publishing has increased dramatically, the number of units sold has not. While the amount of information being generated is growing at unbelievable rates, library materials budgets are not.

Both librarians and publishers have valid concerns about copyright legislation. Authors and other creators, as well as publishers, cannot work for free; yet, the public's right to know must be preserved. Lack of effective negotiation on copyright has done more harm to publisher/library communications and trust than any other single issue. Until that matter is resolved—until both parties agree to arrive at a sensible solution—probably some of the action I suggest in this article cannot be taken. Publishers and librarians agree on many more issues than they disagree on, but the present antagonistic posture of both parties is inhibiting a great deal of cooperative work.

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### *The Effects of Automation on Publishing and Libraries*

The use of the computer in publishing and libraries is a major reason both groups feel threatened, unprepared, and yes, hopeful. One need not look far to find prophets of the death of the book, indeed, of all print. With every new technological development (film and other audiovisual material, microforms) and new leisure-time devices (bicycles, radio and television), the death of the book has been pronounced—prematurely.

I should confess that I don't agree that computers will be the final blow to books—for many reasons articulated in *Daedalus* by Dan Lacy, Samuel S. Vaughan, Lewis Branscomb, William Goodman, and others. The book is uniquely portable, legible, unmechanical. The content of books is important to people, so the medium that brings the content is important too. After all, books have a tremendous head start on the newer media; perhaps some day mention of a computer program or an abstract will bring tears of joy to users' eyes, but I doubt it.

Like West Virginia, publishing is wild and wonderful. It is an intellectual, exciting, important business to work in. Good ideas and able people count. Publishing is changing, but those characteristics seem still to be there. Young people are drawn to the book industry because they are allowed to work hard and, if they show potential for "thinking like a publisher," they move up from job to job, house to house. One thing is evident: it is not the *money* that keeps anyone in publishing. Salaries are roughly equivalent to those in academia. As an industry, publishing generates a profit just under what one can earn by investing in safe securities.

But publishing is more than people and books. It is—always has been, and always will be—first and foremost a process or system without which the entire information community, and all its users, would quickly collapse. I am dumbfounded by much that I read about the computer's potential for instant distribution of all information to everyone in the world all the time. Surely intelligent information scientists and other computer experts realize that if every word written, each bit of scientific data processed, is made available, the wealth of dross would collapse the system. How could we survive if even every book manuscript were available? How could one find the books one wanted or needed to read in all that chaos? Why should library users pay, in one way or another—including taxes—to maintain a system that includes so much ill-conceived and ill-written work, work that doesn't deserve to be made public?

I am speaking of course of the function of the publisher as gatekeeper. By making a combined editorial/marketing decision, each publisher decides what to publish and at the same time what *not* to publish. Some magnitude of the problem is suggested in John H. Jenkins's statement: "A recent *New York Times* study indicates that the chances of an unsolicited manuscript being published is 15,000 to 1."<sup>2</sup> I have heard educators, librarians and unpublished authors complain about how "unfair" the process is, about the tremendous numbers of important books that are not being published because publishers are looking only for "blockbusters" and tried-and-true formula books. That simply is not the case. Authors of publishable manuscripts who take the time to study publishers' lists to determine where their manuscripts might find likely homes and who submit them with informative cover letters will eventually find publishers. If there are great American novels moldering in desk drawers, the reason is that their authors did not sustain sufficient energy and nerve to find a publisher.

One problem today, in fact, is that more and more fiction is being written, in part as a result of its being taught in colleges and universities. Whether a publisher thinks he can publish (not edit, not print, not sell, but *publish*) it successfully is his decision. What Harper turns down Godine might well accept. Houses differ greatly, and the men (and a handful of women) who run them are individualistic. Like authors (and other people), they have egos, too. They publish to *their* vision of what their imprint should be, not someone else's vision. The successful book is that which generates excitement inside the house. It is this excitement that promotion and marketing people work to "bottle and sell" to the appropriate media outside: reviewers, other writers and publishers, newspapers, magazines, radio, and television. The worst thing that can happen to a manuscript is for the person who generated the excitement at the publishing house to lose that interest before the book is published, or to move on to another position. The book can become an orphan; it can be "privatized," as William B. Decker, novelist and former managing editor at Viking, has said, not published.

I have passed over the third essential step in the publicizing process—the production of the physical book—because Len Shatzkin has covered the topic so completely in his article. Suffice it to say that the computer is making change possible faster in this aspect of publishing than any other—and with potential for savings that will help to keep book prices down. (People who get hysterical about book prices should remember that publishing is a labor-intensive occupation, and that about 85 percent of the actual cost of any book is in *people* costs. As

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salaries have gone up in publishing, composition, printing, and binding—to say nothing of paper production—and as publishers have had to pay higher rents and more for equipment and communication services, the cost of books has had to go up.)

In whatever form information is produced, it has to pass through these three steps of selection or editing, production, and promotion and marketing. Saying this implies that some party—I think it will be publishers—will continue to pay something to the author/creator to make his material public and that, in turn, customers will pay something to acquire the material or to use it. I don't think we should socialize publishing; I think the capitalistic system works quite well. Authors' and publishers' rights of ownership should be maintained.

Let us assume they are, and let us hypothesize that a publisher/producer of any kind of material needs to make a profit of \$4000 on one item. That can be done in several ways. He can produce 4000 copies and add a dollar to the cost of each unit. He can produce 2000 copies and add \$2 to each unit. Or, at the other end of the scale, he can produce one copy on a video disk and charge \$4000 for it. Then libraries that want copies can pay the publisher—or a middle network—for the copies they want. The physical work of producing something still has to be done, and what is most important in many ways, potential customers still need to know that the item exists. It still will need to be promoted and sold.

Much of what one reads in library literature about our future use of media implies that librarians at the point of purchase will have an option, that they can decide whether they want a hardcover, paperback or video disk "copy" of *Duhem on Medieval Cosmology: Theories of Infinity, Place, Time, Void, and the Plurality of Worlds* by Roger Ariew (University of Chicago Press, 1985), for example. I don't think libraries always will have that option. I think the publisher at some point will have to decide in what form he can afford to make the title available and, if librarians want to purchase it, they will have to be able to make it available to users in that form.

Application of the newer technologies in libraries and publishing raises the question of free *v.* fee information service. Will libraries use the arrival of new forms of communication to initiate fee-for-service systems, much as there are charges now for computer searches? Will patrons pay for and keep hard copies made from video disks, rather than borrowing a book? Librarians and other information scientists and library supporters are thinking through this issue now, because if access and the serendipitous discovery of books and other media cease to be a prime factor in information use—if patrons have to know exactly which

item they want in order to get any item efficiently—then it will be difficult to promote to taxpayers the importance of libraries as places where materials are collected and made available. If the United States embraces the Public Lending Right at some future date, books will take their place as value-added items alongside computerized services on which a charge is placed.

Librarians, booksellers and publishers are aware of the tremendous amount of book reading and book buying that goes on because people happen to find an idea or title that interests them. People browse through books and periodicals, as well as listening to radio and television, rather than turning to a particular medium for only one kind of information or reading experience. People come to the library for a magazine article and go home carrying several books on unrelated topics. Readers are serendipitous. In a recent study of library use at Virginia Tech entitled *The Landscape of Literatures*, Dr. Paul Metz suggests that:

While the present data replicate many findings from citation studies, they indicate important differences in the extent to which specialized literatures satisfy the needs of most disciplines. Generally, those fields which cite their own literatures most heavily also use a heavy concentration of library materials in their own literatures. The findings for the departments of mathematics and geography are in accord with the citation literature in showing, respectively, a very high and a very low degree of dependence on endogenous literatures. Although the difference between mathematicians' practices and those of geographers is in the same direction whether measured by citation counts or circulation records, in both cases the library data show a greater dependence on external literatures than citation counts reveal. This distinction is typical of most of the comparisons that could be made. The difference between library use within specialized literatures and citation of endogenous materials is found not only within the sciences and social sciences, but within the humanities as well; the circulation data show a wider use of literatures by historians and specialists in literature than was revealed by a citation study conducted for the National Enquiry [*Scholarly Communication: The Report of the National Enquiry*. Baltimore, Md.: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979, p. 46]....

The results of the study have a number of implications for the most basic aspects of library policy. By showing the degree to which use patterns depend on the disciplinary affiliation of library users, the study suggests that library use studies will be generalizable only to a limited degree and that an understanding of use must be based on the particular characteristics and missions of local institutions. By showing that specialists and nonspecialists use materials differently, the results call for a re-examination of fund allocation approaches to collection development. By demonstrating the extent and nature of cross-disciplinary use and the effects of decentralization, the results call into question the scattering of library collections and

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suggest lines of division which might best govern the structure of library systems. The high volume of cross-disciplinary use of library materials which the data have shown suggests that strong central libraries may be a powerful centripetal counterforce to the tendency of academic disciplines to break into non-communicating specialties. Both the findings that specialists and nonspecialists approach literatures differently and that branch libraries appear to channel reading patterns provide a basis for arguing that, when library policies are set by client groups, the result may be private virtues which are public vices. Such an argument would support the role of professional librarians as the best trustees of collections and arbiters of conflicting interests within user communities.

The data from this study tend to indicate that the use of periodicals follows disciplinary lines more than does the use of monographs, though periodicals use is by no means totally predictable. Just how closely the use of periodicals follows disciplinary lines cannot be specified in this report, but it would be important to know this....

It appears that the less closely patron and material are related, the more likely materials are to be monographic; it may well be that even if an analysis is restricted to the use of monographs, the slowness of communications among fields would be such that older materials are used disproportionately by those from more remote fields.<sup>3</sup>

Not everything we read is something that we set out to find; the wealth of choices of all kinds of media and all kinds of ideas has been the strength of the American library system. The word "book" doesn't have to become pejorative just because librarians need to focus more attention (and funds) on acquiring automated data services. It is puzzling to hear informed, sophisticated librarians say, for instance, that accessing online information will threaten the library's policy of access to materials on all sides of an issue.

Surely libraries won't use one system as the sole source for all their materials, or to such an extent that the library would be harmed by biases built into systems produced by commercial entities. I should hazard a guess that never a book has been published without some bias, and that, while it sometimes doesn't turn out that way, most commercial publishers plan for (or hope for) a profit. Why do some librarians and scholars assume that anyone will be allowed to put anything in these massive and ubiquitous databases? Surely the scholars who create the databases will arrange in some way for their distribution and protection—with limited and authorized access to their content. Why are some librarians and other scholars so quick to assume that the *principles* of publishing will cease to exist because data will be delivered in an automated form?

While it is true that many academic libraries today are spending a larger percent of their materials acquisition budgets on serials than on

books, the vast majority of items held by such libraries are books. Books still are the medium that draws most users to the library. Scholars of the humanities, literature, philosophy, religion, history and the other liberal arts—like readers of drama, poetry, fiction and nonfiction—will continue to seek book materials. Some readers are more interested in books published many years ago than they are in the latest research. Scholars and students in the sciences, engineering and technology are the ones seeking up-to-the-minute information, and libraries are beginning to meet that need. But the needs of one group of disciplines have heretofore never dictated library policy for all the disciplines; nor has one group heretofore continually laid claim to the lion's share of the budget.

Until quite recently, the selection, acquiring and lending of books (and other print materials) was thought to be part of a library's mission and service. Today, borrowing and lending books effectively sometimes is said to be less animated, duller, and more "old fashioned" than acquiring and using automated information. I think that libraries are at the heart of the learning process in this country and that they will stay there. One reason is that in most places they are the only show in town; the only place where one can find older books; and libraries offer a rich collection of serious books, classics and basic and seminal works in many, many fields from which to choose. Another is that libraries make possible our form of government. Where else is a "better read, better informed" America to turn?

Just as I don't imagine spending the rest of my life in my living room looking at a screen and pushing buttons, I cannot imagine not leaving the living room for the library. There I will be able to find out what my information options are, and I will learn in such a way that I will respond and use the sources I need. I also expect to find people there who can help me. One finding of Chen's study of information sources<sup>4</sup> needs emphasis: People said that their primary source of information was other *people*. Libraries have taken giant steps *away* from readers' advisory services and making educated, informed librarians, who know ideas and books, available to users. Users can be taught to handle terminals and systems, but it is harder and harder to find people, especially out on the floor in public libraries, of whom you can ask your perhaps not-fully-formed question or make a general inquiry.

### *Signs of Distress in the Library Profession*

Coupled with the coming of the computer in libraries have been other developments that are putting pressure on the library profession.

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The image of the librarian has not improved drastically across the years. Salaries have not improved in libraries at a great rate. It is difficult to recruit able students to the master's degree programs, and several universities have phased out their library schools or merged them with other programs: Rutgers University, The University of Denver, and Case Western Reserve University, and University of Minnesota, to name four. The Office of Personnel Management of the federal government has attempted to reclassify librarians out of the professional series into a clerical series—to date, unsuccessfully. Several legal cases (most notably *Merwine v. the trustees of Mississippi State University*) have prompted librarians to defend the terminal degree, the Master of Library Science/Service/Library and Information Science/Services, as the definition of a professional, even though some of these programs are recognized as weak. Perhaps unfortunately—from a public relations point-of-view (because it sounds like vested self-interest)—the American Library Association has announced that its next Executive Director must hold a library degree from a program accredited by the ALA.

After years of presenting itself as a humane profession with one or both feet solidly in the humanities (and thus knowing and caring about books and people, interested in reading books and talking about them), the profession seems to be moving toward the systems of science and technology, again perhaps because the challenge of automation is great and because librarians themselves are seeking information, knowledge and influence.

Since blame for the nonproductive turmoil in some ALA Council meetings of late has to be placed somewhere, it all too easily gets directed at publishing. That policy-making and -monitoring body of the ALA has recently discussed and passed two empty resolutions—one on freight pass-through (which affected a few libraries briefly because clerical errors were made by wholesalers) and the other on trade book discounts. If ALA wants to write a policy statement for publishing, it should appoint a committee of librarians and publishers to try to do that. It is important to note that the ALA division that works most directly with publishers and wholesalers, the Resources and Technical Services Division, tried hard in both cases to keep these resolutions from coming to the ALA Council.

A handful of librarians seem to look down on commerce—especially the commerce indulged in by book publishers—not that of profit-making producers of furniture and other library supplies and equipment, or of databases and other automated products, including library systems. The solution to this kind of problem lies where it

always has been: in educational programs and library school courses that help librarians more efficiently to select and purchase library materials. Earlier efforts (the 1969 and 1972 preconferences to ALA conferences, for example) proved very useful and successful. The CIP (cataloging-in-publication) program was regenerated as a direct result of the 1969 meeting.

*Pressures on Scholars and Scholarly Publishers*

While trade book publishers in general are examining the options automation offers them, one segment of the industry is being forced by the economics of specialized markets and short-run books to embrace automation, although there still is "less here than meets the eye," as Martin Levin has so aptly said.<sup>5</sup> University presses and other scholarly publishers more and more often are asking authors if their institution can provide camera-ready copy in the form of laser-printed or typeset pages. If the institution has the capacity to capture the author's keystroke to drive photocomposition equipment, the publisher saves the cost of setting the book (or reimburses the institution for its lower-than-market costs).

Incompatibility of equipment has been a major problem for scholarly presses, which often find it cheaper to re-keystroke the manuscript than to convert it to the system used by the commercial photocompositor. If the press can accept the tape or disk, then either the editor has to make changes on that record or, more usually, the edited hard-copy manuscript is returned to the author, who makes the changes in the automated record. It is then the author's responsibility, too, to assume the publisher's responsibility for final proofreading and checking. While automated systems save money in some cases (which help to keep the prices of books down), faculty are keenly aware of the amount of time they are spending doing tasks formerly thought to be the publishers'.

Scholarly books live in that category of serious works that great numbers of people don't buy, and they are the kind of book in greatest jeopardy. Lola Szladits, curator of the Berg Collection of English and American Literature of The New York Public Library, said it well in the Winter 1983 issue of *Daedalus*:

Today, it is possibly true that the need for and interest in the humanities are on the wane. It cannot be quantified, but it is visible both in the quality and quantity of readers and their work. Fields tend to become narrower, restricted, as some studies are, to major authors or major trends. There is a marked tendency to turn out whatever work is

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required in the fastest possible time. An old-fashioned humanist has trouble understanding research today: instant answers to quick questions. Research—and it cannot be stressed sufficiently—is not identical with information, and in its long-term duration, includes contemplation and articulation.<sup>6</sup>

Libraries have been a primary market for scholarly books, especially academic and special libraries. Technically, it will be possible for a university library to order a copy of a title to be copied from the publisher's video disk when a scholar requests it, but a great many of these serious books are meant to be read in toto. Many are not compilations of data to be consulted one section at a time, but cogent, developed, documented arguments that need to be followed from beginning to end. In short, the same principle that motivates people to read any work of fiction or nonfiction motivates them to read scholarly works. We cannot assume that because scholars use academic libraries, they are going to abandon pursuit of knowledge in books.

For library service, the special power of the computer, of course, is that it can scan vast quantities of machine-readable text or data to locate specific items quickly. The computer's major use will be as a locator or indexer of existing knowledge, wherever it is found. Once a researcher knows that what he seeks can be found in a particular book, he will want to read that book. Again, I am speaking of scholars working in the humanities and social sciences; those in engineering and the hard sciences seek more discrete information, which they often find in databases and journal articles.

The gatekeeping function of the publisher is essential to scholars, especially younger scholars. Should the day come when any research could be made available in any system simply because the author/creator put it in, scholars would lose the power of the referee. Most promotion-and-tenure committees insist on evidence of publication in vetted or refereed journals or in books from recognized scholarly publishers.

If academic libraries continue to cut back on their purchase of specialized scholarly books, if they begin to define the worth or value of an idea in terms of the number of times someone has sought access to it (rather than its importance in a total collection on a particular topic—which is what academic librarians have been good at judging), one could imagine the day when every university of any size would have its own "press," if only to handle requests for hard copies of materials.

In announcing the establishment of a new Office of Scholarly Communication and Technology, John William Ward, president of the

American Council of Learned Societies, said: "The new technology is radically changing the environment in which scholars do their work. Without the participation of scholars, the system will evolve according to administrative, financial and technical imperatives. The great danger is we will end with a system of scholarly communication which will be technically viable, but not intellectually desirable." This new office will:

1. monitor change and disseminate information about important changes in the system of scholarly communication;
2. create closer relationships between major actors in the system (such as research libraries, learned journals, publishers, academic administrators, and corporate firms in the computer industry);
3. initiate studies on how well the system of scholarly communication is working; and
4. explore how technological change affects the way scholars think about their work, not simply how they do their work.<sup>7</sup>

The director is Dr. Herbert C. Morton, former head of the publications program at the Brookings Institution and Resources for the Future, who contributed to the National Enquiry.

Another articulate spokesman for the state of university press publishing today is J.G. Goellner, director of the Johns Hopkins University Press. In 1978 Jack Goellner made the following statement about financial support for university presses:

University press publishing is subsidized publishing, let there be no doubt about that. Even those few presses that receive no operating subsidies from their parent universities depend heavily on title subsidies to support the publication of individual books. It is simply not possible to publish the kinds of books that university presses exist to publish without financial assistance....Many of the best, more important, most enduring scholarly books never sell enough copies to pay for their publication. The products of even the finest scholarship are not always snapped up eagerly in the marketplace....If somehow all financial support for university presses stopped totally tomorrow, most university presses would cease to exist, at least as we know them now, in short order—and the world of scholarship, higher education, and American culture would be much the poorer.<sup>8</sup>

Librarians and other educators, publishers and other vendors of information seem to be witnessing a fair amount of slippage currently of tasks, functions and responsibilities among their fields. Some publishers seem inclined to tell educators and librarians how to do their business, and some librarians and information scientists seem to be

interested in undertaking responsibilities traditionally thought of as belonging to the publisher. Lola Szladits describes one aspect of this situation: "What is missing from all discussions is a fact never questioned in the past few centuries—that we are masters of our future, not victims of machines nor the circumstances they may have created. Librarians can—and ought—to control their own computer programs, lest they sell out to businesses that would impose theirs."<sup>9</sup>

### **The Shared Responsibilities of the Book Community**

Having attempted to outline some of the challenges faced by publishers and librarians in the next decade, I wish to identify a few areas in which we have had and continue to have shared responsibilities. Librarians, other educators and publishers alike decry the fact that 27 million adults are functionally illiterate: these adults are unable to read simple instructions or to complete a simple job application. Another 45 million are only marginally literate, and each year the total number of illiterates grows by 2.25 million persons. Various surveys—the Book Industry Study Group 1983 survey, for instance—show that just under one-half of the adults in this country have read a book in the past year. But if half of the other half cannot read well enough to scan the evening newspaper, it is doubtful that they will make heavy use of libraries, even if talking computers become more available. One still needs to read the material being identified, as well as instructions for accessing it, whether the words are on paper or on a screen. Futurists who dismiss the literacy problem with a wave of the hand overlook many relevant facts, including the cost of serving an illiterate population.

Another area in which publishers and librarians have jointly done good and effective work in the past is what is called, for lack of a better term, "reading development" or "reading promotion." What is meant is projects, campaigns and other efforts to bring more people to reading as a source of information, inspiration, ideas. Not far down this trail one encounters some basic problems, one of which is that in working with librarians one veers soon into the area of library programming to stimulate reading, which is considered by some people to be an area publishers do not know much about. At the Association of American Publishers (AAP), we called it "reading development" when we seized every opportunity to mortise the habit of buying, borrowing and reading books into every receptive organization, individual or project that came our way. The book community needs a creative group to continue that kind of work. Conferences, research projects about book publish-

ing and book use, published reports and papers, special booklists, model projects in the selection and use of books and other materials, and identifying and publicizing highly successful innovative or model book programs—these are some of the kind of things that have been successful and could be again.

*Step One: Reaffirm the Importance of Reading*

First, the book community needs to compile and analyze the evidence it has about the importance of reading and the impact it has on people's lives. Much reading research is carried out in structured school situations by educators who are primarily concerned with how reading is taught, rather than with the development of lifetime reading habits. Theoretically, every citizen of this country is taught to read when he passes through the public schools. But the instruction doesn't stick in many cases—60 million of them, it would seem. That's a lot of people to "miss." The major question is: What in the instructional process, or what in the followup pattern of access to reading materials, inhibits the ability to develop an enthusiasm for reading? Radio, then television, and now the computer have all been hailed as death-knells for books and reading, but these communication formats appear to stimulate reading. Readers who watch television often return to books to find more intellectually challenging, demanding ideas. We are not drowning in PBS (Public Broadcasting System) programs; we are drowning in the mundane, to which "tough," serious books are an antidote.

Mention of such books reminds me of a scholar who just turned ninety-four. She is in reasonable health in a retirement home to which she moved only last year. One of her major activities is reading (after ten years of making do with talking books, she decided to risk cataract surgery so she could read what she wanted to read). I asked her not long ago to what she attributed the fact that her mental capacities were not deteriorated, to which she replied: "I always am reading at least one very tough book." Perhaps challenge, not "entertainment," is the way to keep people sixty-five and over reading.

*Step Two: Forsake the Either/Or Fallacy*

Present debate about the advantages of the newer media and technologies are reminiscent of some of the early debates about the value of mass-market paperbacks. Was *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* worth less in the softcover than the hardcover edition? Is *A Distant Mirror* copied on paper from a video disk more satisfying to a library patron than the current print edition? While disks may solve major

problems of space in libraries, if Mrs. Tuchman's book is reproduced verbatim on sheets of paper, is not the content of the same value (legibility, convenience for the reader, aesthetic pleasure aside)?

Lewis Branscomb's essay on "Video Disc Technology and the Book" in *Books, Libraries, and Electronics* opens the readers' eyes to the possibility of vastly increased indexing and access to materials, interactive media, and the combination of formats. It is about the last of these I wish to comment. If text is to be "illustrated" with audiovisual complements, who will do the choosing? It seems essential that the same creative mind that produced the text of *A Distant Mirror*, for instance, that chose the ideas and the words to carry them, should also choose the music, art and maps that seem to her faithfully to extend her meaning. People who speak of reading as a "passive activity" are not, I suspect, serious readers. Perhaps this comment reveals a basic problem: one cannot see the mind work (unless one is a medical researcher conducting tests). Somehow the computer seems to be the mind in action because it can go through some of the limited, first steps of information processing. But it is not; it is a machine. My dishwasher washing my dishes does not have the same "thoughts" or sensations that I would have doing those same dishes.

At the April 1984 meeting of the Center for the Book advisory board, Helen H. Lyman, former professor of Library Science at the University of Wisconsin and a literacy expert, made the following statement about the impact of mathematics and the computer on our use of language:

A strong divisive trend has been the separation of persons who use the language of mathematics from those who do not. A seeming correlate of this development has been the attempt to transfer to social and humanistic fields a seemingly scientific approach based on mathematics. More often than not this approach appears to result in a pseudo-scientific research and language rather than a verbal structure. A professional language (jargon) further obscures understanding outside of an informed elite. The use of words—the verbal aspects of the culture—has diminished and corrupted the language. A contributing factor has been the demands of a mass culture and mass communication. The dependence on words has lessened while audio and visual objects replace language. In writing, a similar simplicity has developed with limited vocabulary and simplistic sentences. Words become meaningless, lack precision, and euphemisms, acronyms, pseudo-false meanings—even common uses of syntax—are misleading. Politicians, scientists, media communications—yes, educators and librarians—misuse ordinary terms.<sup>10</sup>

In the September 1984 issue of *Scientific American*, Terry Winograd, associate professor of Computer Science and Linguistics at Stan-

ford University, shows why "no existing software deals with meaning over a significant subset of English." He cites ambiguities of various kinds as the reason: lexical, structural, semantic, and pragmatic. These, coupled with problems of metaphor and poetic meaning, "make it impossible at present—and conceivably forever—to design computer programs that come close to full mimicry of human language understanding.... Hopes for a 'voice typewriter' that types text from dictation are just as dim as hopes for high-quality machine translation and language-understanding." Dr. Winograd's findings suggest that computer translation of foreign-language materials and low-cost voice inputting of data are not in our immediate future.

While the computer does open many options for publishers and librarians, they should not get caught up in the either/or battle. For dozens of reasons, totally electronic libraries are not going to exist any day now. Neither are totally automated publishers. While in theory the technology exists to do many more jobs in libraries than are currently automated, in practice, in economic terms, libraries cannot put theory into practice. The book community has an important obligation to strengthen library use by promoting the availability of ideas in a wealth of kinds of materials and formats. Since books are what most people come to libraries to find, and since "book publishers have managed to maintain a degree of social responsibility thus far unmatched by any of the new electronic media,"<sup>11</sup> we should build on the strength of the past. By effectively promoting books and reading, all the concerned parties can promote libraries, information and knowledge. We need to use a familiar, beloved medium to pave the way for all the rest. Now how can we do that?

### **Elements of a Successful Reading Campaign**

#### *The Attack on Illiteracy*

It is difficult to find a group in the book/reading/library community which is not concerned about basic literacy; it is equally difficult to raise modest sums in some small towns and rural areas, for instance, to support local Literacy Volunteers of America (LVA) and related efforts to teach adults to read. The Center for the Book report on the book in the future is a report to Congress and is expected to recommend that Congress help to focus attention on the adult literacy problem and help resolve it, in part with dollars.

Congress should adopt this recommendation and create a literacy program at the national level; which could begin by coordinating the

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various local programs and funneling to them a portion of the modest sums needed to keep them going each year (our local LVA in Blacksburg, Virginia needed the magnificent total of \$1700 for one year—and almost died of malnutrition). Regional, state and local agencies and units of involved groups—including libraries—can work together to assess the need for literacy training in their areas and to allocate appropriate responsibilities to each group so that effective programs are offered to adult illiterates and new literates, and so that the programs are well promoted and supported.

Libraries need not wait for talking computers to reach out to the illiterate and newly literate. Selected collections of materials can be made available; those who cannot read at all can use tapes, films and filmstrips and illustrated books. Past efforts to convince publishers of trade books that they should have limited vocabulary/high interest manuscripts written and published for the new adult reader have not been successful because it has been impossible to describe the locus and size of the market to publishers. It is impossible to find out which agencies currently are buying such materials, or would buy more if they existed. Should the federal government launch and fund an adult literacy program, publishers could anticipate a market and some would publish for it.

Sad to report, a proposal from the Association of American Publishers that President Reagan establish a “Business Committee for Literacy” went unheeded, so no publisher support was generated through the trade association. A year later, Harold McGraw, former president of McGraw-Hill, and several colleagues, including Dan Lacy, established the Business Council for Effective Literacy, which will maintain a small professional staff to interact with adult literacy groups in the field and with the corporate community. It will regularly assess literacy activities and needs and be of help to corporations in more effectively targeting their funds and taking part in national, state and local literacy planning. The Business Council for Effective Literacy will issue research reports, literacy and corporate program profiles, topical pamphlets, and other publications for business and industry. It will provide professional advice and technical assistance and sponsor meetings and seminars. As a relatively small operating foundation, the council will focus on facilitating corporate funding and involvement rather than making large or frequent grants itself. The council hopes to become involved in the reading and writing problems of children in due course, but its immediate and central priority is *adult functional illiteracy*. The council’s seven primary objectives are:

1. Attract corporate financial support to strengthen and expand existing programs of tutor training and tutoring.
2. Encourage corporate support for the development of new approaches to tutoring and tutor training.
3. Encourage the business community to become involved in planning and policy-making.
4. Help advance research on adult literacy.
5. Develop and disseminate general information.
6. Increase general public awareness and understanding about the scale and nature of the illiteracy problem.
7. Foster improved communication.

With ten other related organizations, ALA has established the Coalition for Literacy, which is raising funds for a broad campaign approved by the Advertising Council of America. Some of this support will be provided by the Business Council for Effective Literacy. Launched 12 December 1984, the campaign's goal is to attack the literacy problem on the national level by: (1) recruiting volunteers for existing local literacy programs, and (2) appealing to the business community to make its members aware of the nation's literacy problems and of their stake in helping to reach and teach adult illiterates. An 800 number (1-800-228-8813) has been established to put potential students and tutors in touch with appropriate local programs. By participating in the Coalition for Literacy, the American Library Association has helped local libraries to achieve a leadership role in their communities.

#### *The Purpose and Structure of a National Campaign*

The time is right for the major book, reading and library groups to mount a clearly articulated national campaign to promote books and reading. This effort should be guided by a board or council on which all the major groups are represented. Its purpose should be to inform the public about the importance of and pleasures in books and reading. Its staff should be drawn from the fields of public information (PI)\* and advertising, and it should be housed in its own quarters and should spend funds raised for its use alone.

One of the problems in the book community is that so many groups exist to which book and library people can belong and which they can support. Not many are adequately staffed and funded, and almost none

\*The terms "public information," "public relations," "promotion," and "publicity" are used interchangeably to mean the same thing: efforts to inform the public.

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has the wide dissemination (outside libraries) of public information about books and reading as its primary mission.

It is interesting that, at the end of the line for the White House Conference on Library and Information Services (1979), at the conclusion of the LC meeting on the Book in the Future (1984), and at the close of many articles and books on aspects of publishing and librarianship, the final recommendation is that the "thing we truly need" is a public information campaign. In one way, public information becomes an "out," an easy solution to difficult problems. It is assumed to be the one thing everyone understands, everyone is equipped to critique, and everyone can do with little thought, planning or research. None of these assumptions is correct. Perhaps discussions—oral and written—conclude that public information is the answer because, having talked through divisive problems, the group wants to feel that it has found common ground and consensus in one area at least. If the "doing" of a PI program is the only activity about which the group can agree, it is unlikely that an effective PI program will be generated. People mean such different things when they use the terms "public information," "public relations," and "promotion" that one needs to work hard to make oneself clear.

### *National/Regional/State Articulation of Public Information Goals and Programs*

At the same time the committee and staff are planning for a national reading promotion effort, regional, state and local units of the participating organizations should be determining (1) how they can contribute ideas—content—to the national campaign, and (2) how they can develop an appropriate vehicle within their organizations and with their constituents to accomplish the national goals and goals of their own which relate to the larger campaign.

Using an exemplary project that I know well may reveal how these several levels of involvement can work together: the Books That Made the Difference<sup>12</sup> project of the Center for the Book in the Library of Congress. Phase one was conducted jointly with the College of Arts and Sciences at Virginia Tech. That phase was comprised of interviews with almost 1400 Americans, who were asked two questions: What book made the greatest difference in your life? and What was that difference? Two writer/scholars, Patricia Sabine and Gordon Sabine, met or talked with people in forty-four states to ask these questions. Some of the responses were taped and many subjects were photographed.

The Sabines have presented numerous audiovisual programs drawn from their materials, and just over 200 of the respondents are

included in the book about the project, *Books That Made the Difference: What People Told Us*, which was published in 1983. In addition to the first 128 pages—the interview section—which was offered gratis by the Book-of-the-Month Club to almost a million people in January 1985, the book includes a selection of statements about the importance of reading and libraries and almost forty pages of ideas for local BMAD projects.

For one year, the National Book Awards picked up the Books Make A Difference slogan, as did the American Bookseller Association, but other than individual responses to requests for help, neither the center nor Virginia Tech could undertake a public information campaign to support the concept of regional, state and local projects.

What kinds of books made a difference? All kinds—from *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* to *Escape From Freedom* to *How To Win Friends and Influence People* to *The Sensuous Woman* to *Wuthering Heights*. Only five books (including the Bible and dictionaries) were mentioned by more than three persons; there was a tremendous spread of reading interest. The Sabines found that: “The book is very much alive....(This) project dramatizes the fact that people need to do more than just *get* information; they have to be able to give it meaning for themselves and use it to make a difference for themselves. There is a hunger for books.”<sup>13</sup>

A review of the titles selected by the 1400 subjects left one with the impression that not many classics or bestsellers strongly influenced people; that self-help books loomed large; that serious fiction did not stand out. Yet when the Sabines read and reread statements to cull the best—the most interesting, the best-said, the most thoughtful—they discovered that the effective statements were made, in general, about serious books (many in the humanities), those that have lasted, those that are still in demand and still in print.

The Books Make A Difference (BMAD) idea is endlessly flexible and tailor-made for both national and local promotion campaigns. I cite it here because it is the kind of idea that a national organization that existed to bring word about books/reading/libraries to a mass audience of readers and potential readers, library users and potential users, could have picked up and seeded right across the country. I am not suggesting that a new organization would necessarily reach back for this idea.

The Center for the Book, in fact, intended to “place” the BMAD concept with an appropriate organization, but we were unsuccessful. One reason we failed is that we encountered “turf problems.” While admitting that it was a good concept—simple but exciting, interesting

but not too complicated or expensive for even the smallest library to undertake—a few groups said they could not take it up because it was not their idea, because they would not get “credit” or visibility for devising BMAD projects. We on the center’s board thought we had performed a service for libraries—in a time of tight budgets, staff layoffs, and library closings—by devising a trial run to be sure our idea truly worked. Our efforts to donate an idea (which could easily have been adapted to a parent group’s focus) and a good bit of preliminary work failed. Hence my earlier statement that a new agency or organization has to be adequately funded and staffed independently, which is *not* to say that the pattern of cooperation seen in the BMAD project should not be replicated.

How might a national program work, and why couldn’t the Center for the Book and my College of Arts and Sciences launch it? Money, in a word. Only the interview portion of the project was even partially funded, so we were unable to create a national promotion to which local projects could attach themselves. What would an ideal scenario have been?

We needed to create visible promotion materials that could be distributed free or at modest cost to locales: posters, brochures, buttons, bookmarks, camera-ready art, ad mats, and “canned” releases that local librarians could adapt for their own use. We should have published a series of how-to-do-it pamphlets to get people started in planning and doing projects. One might have dealt with generating interest among the local media, working cooperatively with them, and getting the interviewer or interesting subjects on radio and television programs (especially call-in shows). Another might have suggested kinds and locations of exhibits around the community, not just in the library. A third might have shown libraries how to get major industries and groups to conduct their own in-house BMAD projects. We might have provided camera-ready art and complete ads (to which local dates and places for interviews, programs, exhibits could have been added so local projects could be easily advertised).

Perhaps the most important ingredient in such a campaign are professional promotion and program staff members who can go from place to place to help local people start projects and to assist states and regions in coordinating and promoting the results of projects. In one place, the Friends of the Library might be the project sponsor; in another it might be the Rotary Club; in a third it could be the local literacy group. Staff members need to be able to work with such groups and to help put them in touch with one another.

Professionals don't "do" BMAD projects—or National Library Week or Banned Books Week or Children's Book Week—for the sake of the event. They use such vehicles to promote books, reading and libraries. The whole point of the BMAD project is that it is a library promotion venture. Why? Because the library is *the* community resource where all those titles and many, many more can be found. Local interviewers could make this point, which would be reinforced if they handed out information about the library to every subject.

Two responses from librarians with whom I talked in setting up the original project made me aware of the project's potential. One was the typical reaction: "We're delighted to participate in such an upbeat, positive effort related to ideas. These are tough times in libraries. We don't have many opportunities to go to our taxpayers with a positive message." (Many librarians who made this kind of statement were watching City Hall hack their budgets to death while they contemplated bond issues and branch closings.) The other point was related: "This project gives us an opportunity to offer the media here something fresh, interesting and noncontroversial; we can give, not take."

In a BMAD campaign, while some members of the national staff were helping start state, regional and local projects, others could be interviewing "famous" subjects, and taping and photographing them. These interviews would be fed out to the states a few at a time—or grouped by areas such as sports, film, theater, music, political life, and the like—so local project directors would have a constant feed of fresh books and differences from famous people, those to whom local people would pay attention, to whom they would respond. Packaging such interviews on tape and film for distribution to radio and television stations would be effective. Broadcasters could use them as spot announcements with a message from the library, or about the local project.

There isn't space here to spell out all the administrative and working relationships that need to be developed to create an effective national network of people dedicated to the promotion of books and reading. I mean to suggest only that it can be done and that a professionally conceived and developed continuing PI effort could provide essential aid to states and locales. Many, many different agencies do effective one-shot PI programs, which are in part wasted because there is no followup, no analysis. In conducting BMAD projects, for instance, libraries could learn a great deal about what the public knows and does not know, thinks and does not think about the library itself. Projects could be one vehicle (among several) to assess user needs.

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From the myriad of education and library organizations that promote libraries and library causes, one stands out—the American Library Association. Nothing I have said here should be construed as negative comment about its communications program. Indeed, the newly enlarged vision for National Library Week is based on establishing a network of concerned, involved organizations whose members also care about the contribution libraries make in our society. But the whole burden of book/reading/library promotion is not ALA's alone. The book community is larger than just teachers or just librarians or just publishers. We need most an effective mechanism to integrate the PI goals of all appropriate groups and, at least annually, to conduct a national reading promotion campaign that most groups can adopt and play off of through their units across the country. We need a catalyst, which might be called the National Reading Council.

Why don't we have such an organization? For two primary reasons:

1. Book publishers, likely beneficiaries who are proficient at promoting and selling their own titles, see the need for a general promotion effort but they appear to be unwilling to support it financially.
2. Librarians, also likely beneficiaries, are not generally proficient at PI; as libraries have spent more and more money on nonbook materials and services, many library managers, at least, have turned their backs on books and reading as promotion vehicles for the library.

In the book industry, effective directors of promotion, publicity, advertising, and sales departments usually are members of the management team who participate in major decisions about many aspects of book publishing and who usually are respected and quite well paid. In libraries, PI people generally have low visibility, are rarely members of the management team, and often do PI work in addition to other major assignments.

Readers of *Publishers' Weekly* and other trade journals are aware that the Association of American Publishers has cut back staff support of its projects that help people to develop lifetime reading habits. Readers of *American Libraries* and other library media know that there are a large number of subgroups in the library community trying to promote library causes effectively but not enjoying the success they should.

Many library administrators think library PI is what they read about: releases, social events, spot announcements for radio and television, brochures and other publications, posters, etc. That is not the case. Those items are the frosting on the cake. The thinking and planning,

the strategy and work that produce such items is public information. Because, however, the visible bits and pieces of a PI effort are what can be promoted, PI is viewed as itsy, bitsy—and confused, diffuse and consisting of minutiae. Launching an effective national campaign could help to educate and motivate those library managers who seem to need the exposure, those who don't fully appreciate the importance of quality library promotion.

If a national umbrella organization—a National Reading Council—were created, individual librarians would have to understand the need for focus on some characteristic of libraries that is also common to other cooperating groups, and that can be isolated and used to promote library service. Another reason library PI is viewed as diffuse and ineffectual is that libraries send contradictory messages to the public; one talks about its automated catalog, another promotes programs for children, and a third tries to raise money for a new branch. The image of libraries has dimmed as library promoters have tried to keep librarians *inside* happy, rather than sending messages that users *outside* can respond to.

Those who use libraries today know that all kinds of materials can be found there—print, nonprint, automated—and rejoice in that fact, especially when they find what they seek. In an attempt, however, to escape the “libraries are merely storehouses of books” notion, librarians have confused the public, which has not helped the image of librarians. Any successful PI effort finds a tool, a hook, a symbol that will work in a variety of different situations, formats, times, and places. That symbol, I think, is reading and the book. Libraries should consider returning to what has been a successful tool to promote libraries.

Using books as the promotion tool, libraries can find allies with money and enthusiasm for a national campaign. Literacy is on everyone's mind. Reading is done in many places in addition to the library, but millions of people get what they read from the library. Further, the concept of books and reading enjoys the support of numerous nonbook nonlibrary organizations; some aspect of their national program links up to books. It is books and reading that are the common denominator. If library groups solicited publisher support and treated publishers like true partners, they would respond. One doesn't hear of library furniture producers promoting furniture in general, or database producers stimulating interest in any but the ones they market. Librarians should not overlook the support they have had from publishers in the past—support they could have again.

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Just as some librarians view the newer media and technologies as more important than books, so some library promoters view using radio and television to promote libraries as, somehow, more "important" than print. The result is that the quality of promotional writing about libraries has decreased in the past fifteen years.

Efforts to produce films, filmstrips, spot announcements, and slide/tape shows that don't start with a script never are successful because the cohesion, the editorial point-of-view, the thought process one wants an audience to go through is missing. Libraries may have taken a route in promoting their services which makes less of an impression on the user than does a brochure or release. For one thing, it takes longer to read something than to watch it briefly on television or listen to it on the radio; people remember more of what they read than of what they are told. Furthermore, a large percentage of Americans do their listening and viewing while they are doing something else. It is almost impossible to read something attentively and do anything else, so one's attention is more focused while reading. As W. Russell Neuman, co-director of the MIT Program on Communication Policy, has said:

To understand how media are really used in the home, consider the Least Objectionable Program Theory. Television executive Paul Klein's notion is that the average viewer does not watch a program per se, but rather watches "television." The viewer plops down in front of the set, spins the dial, examines the programs available, and selects the least objectionable. Surveys repeatedly confirm that most viewers report watching "whatever is on...."

According to the latest Nielsen data, the average viewer watches about 4.5 hours of television a day. Women over fifty-five years of age average about six hours a day. The set is on seven hours a day. Television is a tremendously successful commercial medium. The audience, on the whole, is quite happy with it. But people are not using this quintessential mass medium for information retrieval.

Television, as well as the magazines in the bathroom and the radio in the kitchen, become part of the environment of the house. They are conveniently available and part of the ambience. They are not sought out purposefully for information retrieval; they are part of the media habit. Much of the time they are used while other activities are ongoing. Viewers focus on the television only sixty-five percent of the time. Thirty-three to fifty-five percent of the time television shares their attention with other household activities. The percentages are even higher for radio. Users consume our media in a casual and passive way. Only three percent even bother to change the channel when a commercial comes on in the middle of a program.<sup>14</sup>

## Conclusion

In times of stress when people feel threatened, they naturally respond by pulling back, by doing only the essential things, by attending first to their own needs and those of others for whom they are responsible. Both publishers and librarians have lived through periods of stress in the last decade. Now is the time for these two groups to plan to work together again. Self-service is at times a necessary short-range goal, but in the book community it can quickly become counterproductive. Because the symbiotic relationship between publishers and librarians, producers and users of materials, is so strong, each group makes much more progress if it moves in concert with the other.

Maybe we should have written that book, Dan. Maybe....

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