

FRAMING THE RETREAT: THOUGHTS ON THE NEW WORLD ORDER IN COLLECTION DEVELOPMENT

MICHAEL A. KELLER

Introduction and Dedication

Mario Casalini was a bookman linking libraries outside of Italy to Italian publishers, providing thereby a vital and personal representation of Italian culture of all periods to U.S. and other libraries. Like ancient Roman roads, Roman civil administration, and the Imperial Roman ability to grow by adapting local traditions and practices, Mario provided and through his heirs, Barbara Dilaghi and Michele Casalini, continues to provide a common system for access to Italian books, serials, and other publications. Like medieval librarians, he transmitted and they transmit texts and news by their system, and by personal contact and service. Like Renaissance Florentine bankers, Mario maintained and his children maintain relationships across good times and bad in order for the next opportunities to be realized by both sides of the trading relationships. Like 18th- and 19th-century Italian authors, artists and composers, Mario possessed a passion for *la vita e la cultura Italiana, ma anche la vita americana*. As a child of 20th-century Italy, Mario's personality was tempered by a wry irony for the vagaries of individual lives and behaviors as well as a sense of humor about institutional and governmental eccentricity. In the last years of his life, Mario was fully engaged in the uses of information technology in serving his clients, in producing new texts in his publishing ventures, and, with Barbara and Michele, in contriving the use of the new technologies and the global network to continue in service to publishers and to libraries. This conference in many senses is a reflection on Mario's life and on our common aspirations to fulfill our responsibilities in the vast middle ground between authors and readers.

The very phrase "collection development" conditions our thinking about change in libraries. Has there been a time, ever, in which building collections has been a static activity? The sessions of this conference suggest in their titles and by the activities and responsibilities of the speakers much more than evolution in this aspect of our libraries and the information industry itself. My contribution to this conference is organized according to the rubrics of

Contexts
Intertexts
Dependencies
Media & Distribution, and
Commonality & Difference.

Contexts

It should be perfectly apparent to all of us that the contexts of our work have been changing at accelerated rates for the past few years. I have the sense that librarians' tools and techniques began to change with the growth of the national bibliographic utilities and enterprises in the late 1960s and 1970s. Publishers and agents followed suit in the 1970s and 1980s. By the early 1990s, we were all set for some momentous change and it happened. The easy availability of the Internet and the free public distribution of good and constantly better network browsers has broken the flood gates of change. Briefly to recapitulate the common context we all speak of...there are authors, readers, and a group of middle players between them. This conference is populated by the middle players and considers primarily one middle institution and one of its functions, that of libraries and collection development. I should point out as well that the roles, relationships, and functions of the middle players have never been fixed, but also have never been more in flux than now. The Internet, server technologies, and good browsers have made more publishers, haven given more easy opportunities for new sorts of libraries and librarians, have offered influence on the larger social functions of publishers, librarians, and booksellers. These same factors have made new business opportunities for the usual suspects as well as new ones, the aggregators. There are as well new threats to one and all in the middle. *Allez, allez* home free all is NOT the model now at all.

A more classic context, that of building collections of books, of journals, or other library materials is important to keep in mind as well. With all the chatter and splatter of digital library initiatives, on-line STM journals, pre-print servers, and so forth, we have tended to ignore and, who knows, denigrate by our inattention the traditional activities of individual and institutional collectors. To all the librarians in the conference and many of the booksellers, may I remind you that a great many more books and other printed items are produced now than ever before, most of them NOT available in digital form, especially on the global networks. Of importance to humanists and social scientists as well as to scientists in their leisure moments are good books. A great many private collectors are quietly building collections of significance, of authors, subjects, genres, imprints, periods...of bindings, illustrators, curiosities. And these collections ought ultimately to come into our library collections for the commonweal. In all sorts and sizes of libraries, we should continue to cultivate and encourage such private collecting because that kind of collecting, that focused, even obsessive or compulsive acquisitive sensibility, is frequently difficult, impossible, or even unwise for institutional collectors to pursue.

I should like to mention as a lapsed bibliographer myself the significance of the work of bibliographers in defining, in selecting by various principles, collections which in many cases are never really brought together in one place. In our zeal and fascination with

network information, I worry that we forget and thus devalue the intellectual contribution of our subject specialists. The preparation and publication of bibliographies (no, not catalogs and not mere lists), especially those with descriptive and critical commentary, remains a fundamental activity of worth for the cultural role of libraries and to the readers, including professional scholars, who otherwise would never approach systematic thinking about nor organization of knowledge.

And speaking of traditions... The work of booksellers, for individuals, but particularly for libraries, needs to remain in view as well. For all the consolidation of the trade we hear about in hyped ways (and here I speak of amazon.com and its on-line competitors), the work of booksellers in serving libraries with good lists, making ropes of the various threads from publishers, in understanding and interpreting the publishing trends and quirks of individual publishers in their regions of competence and influence... all these are still important and enormously valuable to libraries. Those booksellers in the room and elsewhere who have begun to work with librarians to cut the time and costs of the transactions as well as improving the quantity, quality, and usability of order and bibliographic information deserve our thanks. We ought as well to acknowledge their foresight in undertaking with us the re-engineering of the selection and acquisition processes feeding our collections. The new approaches by booksellers have made it possible for us to continue to build collections of significance. Our readers, our scholars and students, derive benefit from the work of booksellers and even though to many of those readers booksellers are invisible, we librarians should continue to work with booksellers for the day has not yet come, nor will it come in the next decades when books and other printed sources disappear.

Speaking of disappearing...publishers are not going away either. For all the consolidations we see in the for-profit publishing arena, numerous others are arising to publish and to print books. The tools are changing and the modes of marketing are different, but the work is still important. We need publishers, we need to publish as well. The forms of publication are enlarging in number and changing in quality thanks to the new technologies, but nevermore has the role of publishers as gatekeepers been more important. To all those who advocate the transformation of the refereeing process, I say, good luck. The social and economic reasons for publishers to exist will survive the Stevan Harnads and Paul Ginsburgs and so will publishers themselves.

Finally to the librarians who build collections by smart selection, timely acquisition, and careful organization and creation of intellectual access, may I point out that the information technology revolution has in fact given us new tools, new challenges, and new threats. For us to continue to be relevant, the gathering of published and archival source material for our current readers and for posterity must continue. Collection development counts. The fact that some and soon more of the sources and commentaries are in digital forms, sometimes solely in those formats, need not deter us

from our work. The chaos of the network information spaces needs our attention and as long as authors write and readers read, building collections and providing access to individual items in them will be necessary.

Having just paid obeisance to our comfortable traditions, let me throw a wild card on the table. None of the traditional roles and responsibilities should go unchallenged in a time when the network and the millions of computers connected to it give thinking humans the freedom to speak and to write and to distribute, that is, to publish, their thoughts and words for many to read. I think that the various marketplaces, of ideas as well as of attention, money and influence, operate well enough despite or maybe because of the new technologies and networks to help us continuously to shake out the roles and responsibilities of the middle players. We should not shy from such shaking and thus from the re-distribution of roles and responsibilities, including the disappearance or considerable alteration of appearance or function of some of the individual players.

To conclude this section on contexts, I wish to acknowledge that many different sorts of libraries exist and that they overlaps as much as diverge. Nothing I have said so far is more meaningful to one sort of library than for another.

One of the best things we might do for one another is to attempt to understand one another's contexts as this conference goes forward.

Intertexts

Now, to that made-up word, "intertexts." I could have used the term "hypertexts," I suppose, but that term does not embrace as much as I wish to convey. There is a little constellation of ideas of enormous importance, especially for the distant future of the intellectual lives of our successors. First among these ideas is the inclusion of quotations or references, implied or explicit, cited or borrowed imperceptibly, from other sources, other disciplines, other cultures. Some experienced authors make such references as a stylistic mark. Think of Umberto Eco's book, **Foucault's Pendulum**; it is so replete with references that most of us cannot read the book without the dictionary of quotes, references, and in and out notes published in Ferrara soon after the English translation appeared. That is an extreme example. To generalize, all authors, ALL AUTHORS, cite or use the ideas of other authors. An enormous web of interdependent texts and ideas thus arises with each new publication.

Second among these intertext ideas is the notion that some of us, those in the middle, but especially librarians, are particularly charged and educated to preserve the source texts in their various forms and genres in order to sustain the growing web as much as to provide navigation through it. The notion of an information heuristic as a life-long skill we engender in our readers resides on the foundation of at least the perception of a web of words, of ideas.

Third, the interplay of ideas, the cross pollination of disciplines, and the representation of themes and methods across generations of readers and authors are generative forces in our cultural lives. We see progress in the sciences, technologies, and clinical arts because of such intertextual activity. Where would Watson and Crick have gotten without notions of geometry and physics to feed their work on the structures of DNA?

The hypertext idea is one I take as a kind of icon for a collection of obvious possibilities for improving reading, making it easier for readers to comprehend and to use texts. Hypertexts and hyperlinking make all the more obvious the intertextual relationships. I might point out that the exploitation of hypertexts and hyperlinking has been heavily dependent on the work of librarians and publishers. Publishers have distributed texts and many have seen the beneficial possibilities of hypertexts. Computer scientists have given us techniques. Librarians, in understanding readers, have promoted the use of hypertexts for the improvement of research.

These intertextual ideas taken together add up to a remarkably different and more explicit exposure of the lives of ideas – from conception to adoption to oblivion. The intertextual ideas, I think, should inform our collection building more perhaps than it has in the past. Some self-consciousness of intertextuality among the middle-players as opposed to the intuitive or even unconscious use of intertexts by authors and other creative types, might be useful, even in the sessions and conversations among us in this conference.

Dependencies

Belaboring the obvious on the subject of dependencies might be counterproductive, so let me point out a few significant dependencies to set the stage for the speakers who will enlighten us tomorrow. First, there is language. The seeming and perhaps transitory dominance of English as the lingua franca of commerce and scholarship is to me a false strength. We in the information industry need to account for other languages and thus other cultural heritages – especially in building collections, but as well in the pursuit of our other duties. Second, some social systems, in some regions of the world, establish expectations of the persistence of social roles and those expectations are sufficiently influential to slow or even to prevent revolutionary developments. The global nature of communication now should suggest that revolutionary developments in inter-personal and community communication might help us avoid certain cataclysmic threats to human kind. Related to this notion is that of entitlement mentalities which hinder experimentation and advancement. Too many of our colleagues and staff seem need to comprehend their work at the level of what happens every ten minutes. To the extent that we can, we need to reduce the entitlement mentality and increase the sense of contribution to larger missions and goals than daily minutia. We are dependent on

money and other real and thus finite resources to do our work. Good stewardship of our resources involves constant analyses of costs and benefits. To be sure not all costs and not all benefits are easily measured or expressed, but those of us in leadership roles in the library world as much as in the corporate world need to attend to this kind of dependency.

Access to technology increasingly defines, limits, or expands access to information. We need to acknowledge the need to eliminate what amount to information ghettos inhabited by classes of citizens without effective access to information technology. We need as well to encourage the risk-takers who reach further using technology. Such is the rate of change in the information technology industry that what today may seem costly and far-out, risky and scary, tomorrow will seem ordinary and expected. I should mention here that computer scientists and human biologists have estimated the number of electrical connections in our bodies as a pre-cursor step to realizing the Star Trek function characterized by the phrase "Beam me up Scotty." In my lifetime, I expect to see experimentation in this sort of travel. It would be better than some airline experiences I have had, I hope.

My final dependency is closely related to the previous one. It is the fear of failure. Clearly I do not want to be the first human to step into the beaming chamber. Equally, however, I do desire that some other life forms become the objects of such experimentation. Outside the realm of life-threatening experiments, I think we here should not shy from considering risky notions of change. To switch the terminology, instead of dependencies we should consider how the means and methods at hand today might make our readers and our staff more independent, more self-sufficient in some ways, so that some of our more strategic functions, for instance that of preserving the essences of the cultural record, might flourish.

Media and Distribution

Without doubt, the world is growing smaller. The Internet as a channel for distribution and digital media as carriers of information along that channel presents various of the middle players with threats and opportunities. Certainly the debate and maneuvering around issues of intellectual property and copyright emphasize this. The development of cheap but capacious computers as well as better and better access to networks are obvious reasons for us to be concerned about the rights of creators, the rights of citizens, and the ways we in the intellectual communities trade one against the other. However, I should point out that the reality of ubiquitous computing, the unmistakable trend toward free trade on the net, and resistance to "big brother" control of information should lead us to some reasonable alternatives to the over-control suggested by many licenses and contracts we see coming forward to libraries today for various information products and services.

Related to the digital forms as much as to the total dispersal of the possibility of what amounts to personal publishing, is the problem of the digital archive. Many different approaches to defining and operating digital archives are underway and perhaps do not need much exploration here in this conference. However, our concern for collections, including items which exist only as digital objects, suggests to me that we should at least debate who should be responsible for the digital archive and how it might play into our decisions about acquiring publications or access to digital information sets.

Commonality and Difference

There is a centralizing force at work in developing library collections. Much of that force has to do with money and other resources. Some of it has to do with some of the dependencies I have mentioned as much as the turmoil in the distribution of scholarly information on the web. I have mentioned commonalities earlier in these remarks, so here want to dwell on differences. It seems to me that we in the collection development business do little enough good and perhaps plenty of harm in building collections which resemble one another. In too many cases, one collection is a simple sub-set of another. Rather than building many vanilla collections, we ought to seek to establish and maintain specialties. Improved intellectual access through the bibliographic utilities and faster inter-library loan will make less cumbersome the distribution of the physical parts of those collections to distant citizens, scholars, and students. I exclude no type of library from this challenge. And we ought especially in the research library community to build deep research collections based on the capabilities of a few in a small number of institutions, avoiding the lowest common denominator collaborative programs which spread responsibility and logical collections across too many institutions. Similarly, I expect that we in the library collection development business should expect and receive choices in selecting digital materials for our virtual collections or for access to digital information resources on a lease basis. Those whole collections and entire lists of titles should be measured for the actual value provided to readers and consideration of cost should be among the measures. I was fascinated to hear about the Ohiolink experience in its first half-year of operation in which 40% of the titles provided about 80% of all the texts readers wanted. Those figures suggested to me a substantial waste of money on information not required by readers.

While on the subject of differences, I might mention again that no one of the middle players, whether publishers, agents, aggregators, or librarians, should assume that their role or work is protected. I have no problem with librarians trying to go around publishers, publishers going around librarians, and agents changing their stripes to become aggregators and then to serve readers directly. In cases of various middle players attempting to re-define their work and their clientele, I expect the marketplaces to prove or disprove the viability of the new world order. So rather than attempting to

protect and maintain our common roles, I wonder aloud whether some attempts to develop different ones, even to usurp some roles or at least some functions from others in the chain of communication from authors to readers, might be an essential part in the re-engineering of the information industry.

Conclusion

Let me conclude with an attempt to draw together an aspect of Mario Casalini's life with this conference and our own participation in it. As many of you know and I have said, Mario's professional life involved communicating among his colleagues in different worlds. His was a philosophy of comprehending first and making choices later. Many of you know as well that Mario loved music and was deeply involved with the Amici della Musica in Florence. He attended hundreds of concerts, loved opera, and enjoyed music throughout his life. We could observe this conference as a kind of concert, as a musical metaphor. We have here a concert with lots of performers, an audience which is probably populated as well with a number of critics. Let me propose that we should listen and engage with each presentation on its own, attending to each performance first on its own terms and then in the light of previous performances in this concert, and then finally in the light of concerts past and pending. Rarely does a single concert determine the course of a style or genre or composition. And we should not expect that this retreat will do so for our professions either. Rather, in this lovely place, surrounded by colleagues with whom we may agree or disagree at least some of the time, let us engage in a kind of musical research with various voices sounding themes for investigation and elaboration, even improvisation. In order to get the most of the retreat, it may be useful to appreciate each performance in multiple ways, including one's memory of the presentations some days or weeks hence. For all of his love of music and concerts, Mario possessed a strong critical facility, but his discretion and diplomacy was never overtaken by that sense. We have a fine opportunity made possible by Katina, Becky, and the folks from Casalini Libri, Barbara and Michele, Patricia O'Loughlin and others, to listen, to enjoy, and to debate. Let us do so vigorously, remembering Mario's many virtues.

Thank you for your attention.