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/retrait/birth 2004.html. I no longer feel it would be either appropriate or necessary to give a rundown 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 central to 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/retrait/retreats-2004.html/ferguson.pdf) so the reader 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 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 preserving traditional publications 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 favored protection 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.aau.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. The favored protection 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.

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For me, by far, the most important presentation was that by Deanna Marcum, now Associate Librarian at the Library of Congress. Reviews of trends can be a troublesome one. It is that the restrictions imposed by the licenses enforced by publishers are preventing preservation of content for posterity. It is interesting that the dinner speech by Michael Keller touched on this. It could be argued that publishers are in a defensive posture at present (because of the OA movement and the associate attacks on their role) and it could be that this defensiveness prevents them from taking up challenges thrown down to them by the community. 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 DODI, the NDIP, and the Copyright Commandment. 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 involves a similar approach. There were good presentations on collaboration among libraries, which were useful in their own terms, but only so far.

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