

BOOK WORM

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOCIETY OF EDITORS (WA) INC.

March 2003

FROM THE CHAIR

This is the last *Book Worm* before the society's Annual General Meeting (see below), when we will be electing new office-bearers and general members to the committee. I'd therefore like to use this opportunity to encourage you to think seriously about joining us. Many of our committee members have worked hard and extremely generously for the society for a number of years now. And while some are willing to continue in their roles, we all feel, I think, that it would be fabulous to welcome other members in to take up committee positions. The Society of Editors (WA) is a strong and increasingly significant representative body; it will continue to develop and thrive with the input of fresh talent, different ideas, new approaches.

If you would like to become more closely and actively involved in the society by coming onto the committee, *please* do contact me. We are also planning to implement a quasi-mentoring initiative, for members who are interested in joining the committee but who feel they would like to learn the ropes gradually. Those members can attend some committee meetings, 'shadow' individual committee members, and gradually assume responsibility for specific roles.

Allan Watson, who has done a brilliant job as *Book Worm* Editor for the last two years, will stand down after this issue. Thank you so much Allan for the hard work, great humour and total professionalism that you've dedicated to the job. Thank you too to Lorna de Courtenay, who is also relinquishing her position in March. Lorna has been our astute selector of materials for inclusion in *Book Worm* from other state societies' newsletters. We will miss you both. Our gratitude to Michèle Drouart, who has agreed to continue as the newsletter's expert proofreader. We very much appreciate your continued commitment, Michèle.

I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the AGM — it promises to be a great evening.

Anne Surma

LITERASY: HAD IT A FUTURE?

What a title! The battle has been lost then? Or has it just begun? And what of the future for English, the world language, on this unstable planet? We know we are living now in an era of accelerating change, but have we realised what that could be leading to? Damien Broderick wrote recently of:

... sometime after 2030 and before 2100 ... when history's slowly rising trajectory of progress, having taken a swift turn upward in recent centuries and decades, quickly soars straight up. When change moves off the scale of standard measurements; when it goes asymptotic.*

Or, how do you ride the curve of change when it goes exponential? Is literacy being affected by all this? Where have we been, where are we now, and where do we go?

'Literasy: Had it a Future?' is indeed a title in need of a good collective edit, and who better to lead than the four panellists, State Literature Officer Rob Finlayson and SOEWA members James Hansen, Janet Blagg and Mar Bucknell, who have volunteered their talents for an evening's entertainment at CWA House on Tuesday 18 March.

We'll be following the successful formula of previous years, which is a short AGM at 7 pm followed by wine and cheese, and then the panel at 8 pm. Bring yourself and a friend. The evening is free, except for the usual \$2 per head to cover the cost of hiring the venue:

Board Room
3rd Floor, CWA House,
1174 Hay Street, West Perth
(Note: please enter by door at the rear of the building)

* Damien Broderick *The Spike* (1997), Reed Books, p. 2.

VIVE LE DIFFÉRENCE (OOPS)

As one of those stories circulating via email has it, a French teacher was explaining to her class that in French, unlike English, nouns are designated as either masculine or feminine: 'House' is feminine — 'la maison'. 'Pencil' is

masculine — 'le crayon'.

A student asked, What gender is 'computer'?

Instead of giving the answer, the teacher split the class into two groups — male and female — and asked them to decide for themselves whether 'computer' should be a masculine or a feminine noun. Each group was asked to give four reasons for its recommendation.

The men's group decided that 'computer' should definitely be of the feminine gender ('la computer'), because:

1. No one but their creator understands their internal logic.
2. The native language they use to communicate with other computers is incomprehensible to everyone else.
3. Even the smallest mistakes are stored in long-term memory for possible later review.
4. As soon as you make a commitment to one, you find yourself spending half your salary on accessories for it.

The women's group, however, concluded that computers should be masculine ('le computer') because:

1. In order to do anything with them, you have to turn them on.
2. They have a lot of data but can't think for themselves.
3. They are supposed to help you solve problems, but half the time they ARE the problem.
4. As soon as you commit to one, you realise that if you had waited a little longer you could have got a better model.

SOEWA AT THE PERTH WRITERS FESTIVAL

Many, many thanks to those members who looked after the SOEWA stand at the recent Writers Festival. It really was a test of endurance: the venue was hot, steamy and rather remote from the action. Nevertheless, with impressive new brochures and bookmarks to distribute to the public, the society certainly made its presence felt. We can also be optimistic that we succeeded in heightening our community profile.

IS IT ALL WORTH IT?

Tom Jenkins told the February meeting of a recent editing experience that he thought 'might provide an answer to the question: Is editing a job worth doing?'

In September 2001 I was running a course on self-publishing for an organisation that, like U3A, provides courses for older people. One of my students was a big, outgoing grey-haired man called Bob Southern. At the end of our session he told me he wanted me to help him publish a book about his life as a weatherman. But, he said, I should be aware that he had been diagnosed with lung cancer. However, he thought he'd have time to do it.

A week later, Bob spoke to me again. This time he said his specialist had warned him that new tests had shown he might have only months left. In what I now realise was appalling taste, I said: 'Ah, so we're on a deadline!' Fortunately, he laughed and in fact we got on very well. He had lived a terrific life — being present at atomic bomb tests, travelling the world — and he could write. The book, of 184 B5 pages, in full colour, with the title *My Head In The Clouds*, was done in time to be launched on 8 March last year. The audience of about 160

included his four adult children, some of whom came from Melbourne for the occasion.

It was a happy day. Bob signed and sold about eighty copies at \$25 each. He then went on to launch his book several more times — at his church, at Rotary and Probus clubs. I got him an interview in the *Sunday Times* and he sold more books over the phone and by post, more than 400 copies.

But about three weeks ago, his wife rang to tell me the cancer had turned up in Bob's brain and he was in Murdoch Hospital. I went twice to see him there before he died on 25 January. He was 76.

Over 300 people turned out for his funeral and, in one of the eulogies, his daughter said how lucky we all were that he had finished his book before he died. A variation of its title appeared on the Order of Service. In his obituary in the *Sunday Times* at the weekend, the book got another mention and I wouldn't be surprised if it goes on selling. I feel very privileged to have helped create it.

CREATOR TO CONSUMER (C-2-C): WHAT A WORLD LIES IN BETWEEN!

The following article was originally published in OffPRESS, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (Queensland) for November 2002 and is reproduced here with the kind permission of the publisher and the author, Helena Bond.

The 'creator to consumer in a digital age' (C-2-C) project is a supply chain study of the book-publishing industry. It focuses on technology, markets and skills. There is much in the project of interest to editors.

Started in early 2001, it is now nearing completion, and the organisers — Common Ground Publishing — recently shared some of the project's findings through a series of seminars. They hope to set up networks of informed, interested people to collaborate in making the most of the challenges and opportunities that publishing professionals face.

A 'snapshot' of Australian book publishing in 2001 showed that most publishing work in Australia is in the education sector, and around 50 per cent of materials are published by organisations for which publishing is not their core business. More worryingly, it showed overall book sales down 19 per cent. Printers' profits have been sliced to the bone, running at an average 1.3 per cent. Publishing

profits look a little healthier at around 7 per cent, but only 20 out of 208 Australian publishers are actually making a profit! No wonder they are tempted to skimp on editorial fees.

Content creation and management is an issue for many non-publishing businesses, which could be good news for editors. Digital rights management (DRM) is likely to be handled by electronic content management systems, using digital object identifiers (DOIs) to specify IP rights down to the smallest piece of information that a creator/publisher is willing to distribute independently, but who will ensure that it's not 'garbage in ...'?

DOIs, still under development, aspire to link chunks of content + metadata + IP, in a persistent and unique fashion. They are conceived as very flexible, allowing for parent-child relationships and chunks of various sizes. An international organisation is still working on the details, but they're well advanced, and CAL (Copyright Agency Limited) has been appointed to administer DOIs in Australia.

New markets are emerging and existing markets are changing, with the old model of mass markets for printed books giving way to a new model of masses of niche markets. E-books are likely to be adopted for technical, corporate and educational use, but will they eventually flow on to recreational use? As electronic delivery becomes more accepted, will book pricing move to a licence base rather than a product base?

Power in publishing is moving away from the publisher and towards the creator. Will we return to Gutenberg's business model, in which the publisher, printer and bookseller were all one business? Publishers would be wise to develop closer relationships along the supply chain. Booksellers' roles are also rapidly changing: they are becoming knowledge managers and info-mediaries who help customers to find the information they require.

New services and new skills will be required — are already required. Contract publishing services for the many publishers for whom publishing is not a core business; content and knowledge management services; digital asset management services; e-commerce services; on-line learning services; and more. These new services will require new skills: information architecture; mixing media to deliver a message; XML-based tools, including metadata and standards compliance; new pedagogies for on-line learning; on-line market research and development ...

And where will we learn these new skills? RMIT will soon offer on-line modules as part of an MBA, MEd or MComms. Who else will offer training? Where will

those who don't want a Masters learn?

Whatever our response, we who work with books cannot afford to ignore these changes. These are disruptive technologies requiring change. As a society and as individuals we must ask: What opportunities can we create from this? What will enable us to do what we do better? How can we best move forward?

Opportunities arising

\$\$\$ *Alert:* There's nearly \$20 million in the EPICS (Enhanced Printing Industry Competitiveness Scheme) fund to distribute in the next 18 months, so if you can think of something to do with identifying what your business really is (in a changing world); developing new and future-oriented strategies; and/or developing cost-reduction strategies, put your hand up!

Conference: The C-2-C project will wrap up with an international conference on the *Future of the Book* in Cairns, 22–24 April 2003.

Further information

General: <www.c-2-cProject.com.au>

Conference: <www.Book-Conference.com>

DOIs: <www.doi.org> (the international DOI org)

and <www.copyright.com.au> (CAL)

INDEXFEST

'Indexing the World of Information', an international conference hosted by the Australian Society of Indexers, is to be held at the Carlton Crest Hotel, Sydney, from Friday 12 to Saturday 13 September 2003.

Proposed presentation/panel topics are: indexing biographies; difficult names; teaching indexing; website, intranet and database indexing projects; information architecture; thesaurus construction; taxonomies and classification; metadata development. There will be software demonstrations and workshops.

Cost: Australian Society of Indexers members \$330, non-members \$380.

Contact: Glenda Browne

Email: webindexing@optusnet.com.au

Phone: 02 4739 8199

More information: www.aussi.org

E-STUFF IN PERSPECTIVE: AN EDITOR'S VIEW

Cathy Gray reports on Style Council 2002: The Digital Shift from Print to Electronic Media, which was held in Brisbane from 22 to 24 November 2002. This was originally published in Blue Pencil, the newsletter of the Society of Editors (NSW) for January/ February 2003, and it is reproduced here with the kind permission of publisher and author. A version of this report was also published in Australian Style, the newsletter of the Style Council Centre, based at Macquarie University.

As a conference dedicated to the 'state of the language', Style Council is never a purely academic gathering, although many of the papers delivered are based on research. Rather, it is always a very stimulating blend of principle and practice; theory illuminated by example; language as it is evolving, in use and in context. In 2002 the focus was on language in the context of changing communication media. Style Council 2002 attracted more than one hundred participants to absorb and ponder a wide range of presentations.

In his keynote address, publishing visionary Richard Walsh struck several chords that were to resonate throughout the weekend.

One was his observation that the new 'e-media' have not killed 'p-media' (that's print), as forecast by some 'evangelists' at the end of the 1990s. In fact, like radio faced with the rise of television, 'old' media can find new niches. So the 'shift from print to electronic' can be seen as more an expansion of possibilities than a journey that leaves print behind, consigned to oblivion.

We saw evidence of this in a paper by CCH's Penny Martin, which described research into the use of electronic media (CDs and websites) as an adjunct to print in educational publishing. There is a preference for print as the core medium among both students and teachers, she reported, but supplementary material in electronic form added new and valuable dimensions.

Even in the world of computer games, one of the newest of the new digital media, print has a role. According to Bond University's Jeff Brand and Scott Knight, 'game play' itself is only one component of a computer game package. The accompanying glossy, multiple-page 'manual' provides not just the instructions about how to play but the narrative context — the characters, the background and the story — for the game.

Another keynote introduced by Richard Walsh was an appreciation of the

'experience of reading' in different media. Reading text on screen is still inferior to reading on paper, he said, although some of the factors that currently contribute to this are becoming less relevant as screens improve and new technologies such as 'e-ink' become commercially viable.

The success of e-media will then be more a function of good management and viable business models than technical constraints. 'Impractical dreams are giving way to new realities,' said Walsh.

The relationship between what readers are used to, what they're comfortable with, and what might be seen as 'efficient' or 'good' design emerged in several presentations.

Macquarie University's Jennifer Thurston, for example, cited web usability guru Jakob Nielsen's insight that for a reader the web is experienced as a whole, and an individual website is a mere speck in this universe. When a radically different web page embodying all his principles of good design was resoundingly rejected by users ('Don't expect me to learn new things just for your site!' said one), Nielsen's reluctant conclusion was that modest, incremental change is the only way to go.

Thurston also provided a vivid example of the effect of culture on web page design, as well as print-based conventions. Pointing out that Arabic texts are read from right to left, rather than left to right as they are in English, she showed us an Arabic/English website where the Arabic version was a complete mirror image of the English, with the navigation menu on the right.

Nobody touched on the 'hypertext' experience as a key difference between print and electronic media, although some insights did emerge along the way — the importance of a narrative thread, for example. 'We're currently dazzled by narrative,' said Richard Walsh. We want 'beginning, middle, end'. But for users of a web *site* (as distinct from a web page) the beginning, middle and end of the experience is defined as much by their own actions as by the author or publisher.

The length of text in different media is also an issue. Are electronic texts longer because they're not limited by the physical or cost constraints of print? Or are they shorter because it's harder to read large slabs of print on screen. The answer, it seems, is a bit of both.

A paper by Pam Peters and Adam Smith, provocatively subtitled 'The death of the paragraph?', described the first stage of a Macquarie University research project into text structure in print and online, hypothesising that structural

elements at all levels (section, paragraph and sentence) would be getting smaller. Preliminary indications are, however, that although sections in e-documents may be shorter, paragraphs and sentences can be longer—often extended by devices such as bulleted lists, which are evolving as a key structural device.

However, during the conference the point was made several times that long web documents will often be read as printouts rather than on screen (thus also shifting the print cost from the publisher to the user, which could be seen as an equity issue, particularly for students). This tendency was supported by Queensland University Press's experience with its phenomenally successful POD (print on demand) service: printing out web pages has turned out to be a large part of its business.

The NSW Society's Shelley Kenigsberg and Pamela Hewitt provided insights into the new kinds of interaction that can occur between editors and authors working together in an online environment. In concluding their presentation, Shelley offered a quotation from *Wired Style*, the online style guide developed by *Wired* magazine, which sums up something of the challenge of working with language in the digital age: 'When does jargon end and a new vernacular begin? Where's the line between neologism and hype? What's the language of the global village? How can we keep pace with technology without getting bogged down in empty acronyms? How can we write about machines without losing a sense of humanity and poetry?' <hotwired.lycos.com/hardwired/wiredstyle/>.

There was much more. We heard about new e-lexicons emerging from SMS messaging and e-commerce; about 're-purposing' news stories for online consumption; and about e-media and education. Access and equity—the problem of a growing 'digital divide'—was raised often by delegates as well as speakers. We were introduced to 'blogs' (weblogs), 'nicks' (chat room nicknames), 'ludology' (the study of games, particularly computer games), and 'papyro-centricity' (a 'paper-centred' world view). Finally, the 6th edition of the *Style manual* was formally launched by project leader Loma Snooks and Peter Donoughue of publisher John Wiley & Sons. A veritable feast.

The proceedings of Style Council 2002 are due to be published in 2003. They'll be worth a close look, so check the Style Council Centre website for details <<http://www.shlrc.mq.edu.au/style/styleconf02.htm>> .

DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: Tuesday 18 March 2003

CONTACTING SOEWA

until 4/3/03

President

Anne Surma, 9287 1494, asurma@murdoch.edu.au

Vice-President

Janet Blagg, 9337 4352, jblagg@q-net.net.au

Secretaries

Susan Green (minutes), 9335 8071, greens@mail.iinet.net.au

Ffion Murphy (membership), 9450 1546, ffion@iinet.net.au

Treasurer

Linda Browning, 9266 2253, tbrownin@cc.curtin.edu.au

Education and Training

Betty Durston, bdurston@cygnus.uwa.edu.au

General Committee Members

James Hansen, 9293 1972, jehansen@starwon.com.au

Wendy Bulgin, 9243 5660, wendybulgin@yahoo.com.au

Amanda Curtin, 9377 2091, curtin@highway1.com.au

Newsletter

Editor: Allan Watson, 9381 3732, allanwatson@optusnet.com.au

Researcher: Lorna de Courtenay, 9386 5766, ldecourt@echidna.id.au

Proofreader: Michèle Drouart, 9382 2930, mdrouart@hotmail.com.au

SOEWA Web Site: www.editorswa.iinet.net.au

Colin Muller, colin@twobluedots.com.au