Review of: Petra Hauke, Konrad Umlauf (Hrsg.) (2006)Vom Wandel der Wissensorganisation im Informationszeitalter. Festschrift für Walther Umstätter zum 65. Geburtstag, Bad Honnef: BOCK + HERCHEN Verlag, 379 pp., €27,50, ISBN-10: 3883472484, ISBN-13: 978-3883472485 Online: http://edoc.hu-berlin.de/miscellanies/umstaetter/

by Michael Seadle

Celebrating Transformation: A Review of the Festschrift for Walther Umstätter

A Festschrift is a peculiarly academic method for celebrating a birthday. Instead of balloons, noisemakers, cake and coffee, the academic world invites students and colleagues to assemble the intellectual elements of a person's career. A Festschrift is particularly valuable to an anthropologist of academic culture, because it encompasses the range of human interactions that, at least at one fleeting moment, intersected the life of the object of the Festschrift. Walther Umstätter directed the Institute for "Library Science" through its transformation into the Institute for "Library and Information Science" and many of the articles come from colleagues. These articles give a sense of the intellectual context in which he worked and in which Germany's only university-based library school began the process of reinventing itself to compete with the influential American *iSchools*. While these articles offer valuable insights, those by current and former students are particularly interesting because they represent the Institute's intellectual end products. This review will concentrate on the latter.

The Festschrift includes seven articles by former students from the masters or doctoral program: Olaf Eigenbrodt, Martin Fenske, Simone Fühles-Ubach, Christine Gohsmann, Ben Kaden, Philipp Mayr and Dieter Schwartz and the topics show a particularly strong engagement with cutting edge concepts from digital libraries to issues involving the semantic web. This shows the extent to which the Institute's transformation into a genuine *iSchool* took off during Umstätter's leadership.

Ben Kaden's article "Gegenwart, Zukunft, und Ende der Bibliothekswissenschaft" offers a particularly broad philosophical treatment of the problems and potentials of the field. He writes:

> *In der großen Dichotomie Natur – versus Geisteswissenschaften hängt die Bibliothekswissenschaft gewissermaßen zwischen Baum und Borke. So wie es schwer fällt, eine einzelne bestimmte Methode mit den tatsächlichen und denkbaren Forschungsaufgaben des Faches zu verknüpfen, so divers erscheinen die sich aus den Forschungsfragen ergebenen möglichen Positionierungen im Gefüge der Wissenschaften.* (Kaden, p. 28)

This is indeed one of the key intellectual issues facing library science as a scholarly discipline. Distinctive, highly developed research methods characterize scholarship in the modern world, and any field that merely borrows methods promiscuously risks epithets about its intellectual rigor. Librarianship has no Ranke, no Weber, no Levi-Strauss to define how we approach the problems of our world. If we are not to be a mere trade school, we must take Kaden's warning seriously.

Many professional schools in the US have struggled to address this problem too. In US business schools, the solution has been to draw heavily on a few key disciplines with obvious relevance, such as economics and psychology, and to train students and future faculty to use their methods with indisputable rigor in pursuit of issues relevant to a particular profession. This approach also characterizes the *School of Information* at the *University of Michigan*, whose required introductory curriculum offers an intense excursion into social science methodologies with significant doses of psychology and economics.

Kaden concludes:

> *Dies ist die Aufgabe des Faches: sich als offensive und tragfähige Wissenschaftsdisziplin dahingehend zu entwickeln, dass sie schließlich über sich selbst hinausgeht und aus sich heraus eine neue, zeitangemessene Daseinsform bildet.* (Kaden, p. 44)

During the negotiations for my professorship a number of colleagues spoke about developing a unique Humboldt-school of thought. Kaden and others of his generation may achieve this, given the right tools and support. They understand the syntax of the digital world with the ease of a native speaker. In the meantime a judicious borrowing of disciplinary methods on the model of US business schools may provide an infrastructure on which they can build. The question is: which disciplines?

Olaf Eigenbrodt[1] (2006) offers an implicit answer while talking about digital libraries:

> *Es ist aber wichtig, die Digitale Bibliothek, wenn man sie als Erweiterung der klassischen Bibliothek sieht, in ihren soziologischen Dimensionen auf mikro-, meso-, und makrostruktureller Ebene auszuloten.* (Eigenbrodt, p. 25)

Sociology offers a way to disassemble and analyze the organizational structures that underlie both traditional and digital libraries. It is invaluable for looking inside libraries, but may function less well in the fluid world of online interaction. Sociology can in principle address anything, but it may not readily encompass the problems of building a syntactic meta-thesaurus, such as Martin Fenske[2] (2006) describes:

> *Gehören die beteiligten Thesauri zu unterschiedlichen natürlichen Sprachen (Mehrsprachigkeit) oder unterschiedlichen Dokumentationssprachen (präkombiniert oder postkoordiniert, natürlichsprachig oder Kunstsprache etc.), dann stehen regelmäßig unterschiedliche Benennungen für denselben Begriff.* (Fenske, p. 311)

Library science needs to adopt methodologies that can address the language problems inherent in the construction of a thesaurus, as well as the social dimensions of the construction and the use of the tool itself. Linguistics has obvious relevance, but it does not address the full range of Eigenbrodt's triangle between person, environment, and politics. Anthropology does both.

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[1] title of the article: „Herausforderung Wissensgesellschaft – Die Digitale Bibliothek zwischen Mensch, Umwelt und Politik"

[2] title of the article: „Modell eines automatisierbaren syntaktischen Metathesaurus und seine Eignung für parlamentarische Thesauri im Internet"

US libraries are turning to anthropology to help them understand the services they provide. For example, Jim Rettig (2003), director of the library at the *University of Richmond*, describes the role of anthropologists in understanding reference services:

> *Just as we are experts in information storage, access, retrieval, and systems, we need to become expert anthropologists of our user communities. Through study we need to learn their information-handling habits...* (Rettig, p. 20)

Anthropologists Bonnie Nardi and Vicki O'Day address the Festschrift's key issue: the relationship between people and technology in libraries:

> *Metaphors matter. [...] We see technology as part of an ecology, surrounded by a dense network of relationships in local environments. Each of these metaphors is "right" in some sense; each captures some important characteristic of technology in society.* (Nardi, p. 27)

As Nardi and O'Day say, "metaphors matter" and to understand this Festschrift as a whole, their metaphor is helpful. The key word in the title is "Wandel" and, in some sense the changing intellectual ecology for pre-Library 2.0 fauna has favored certain species who adapt easily to the new environment. For some Festschrift authors, technology is a mere external tool to be used or not as preference and circumstances dictate. For others it is integral to their social and working environment.

It would not be hard to sort the articles by those authors who love the change and those who are doing their best to cope with it. Walter Umstätter had the vision to lead the Institute into an environment where it has a future. That leadership is, in the end, what this Festschrift celebrates.

References

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