

# An Anthropological Analysis of Book Fairs

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Creativity at Work:

An  
Anthropological  
Analysis of Book  
Fairs

*By Brian Moeran*

*April 2009*



# Abstract

This working paper examines the role of international book fairs in the global publishing industry, and in particular their relation to the publishing cycle, chain and field. It outlines some relevant historical features, as well as main functions, of fairs, before describing in detail the daily activities of an independent academic publisher at the Frankfurt Book Fair. Analysis of the book fair takes place at two levels. The first focuses on the importance of visibility in a fair's timing and location, as well as in the location and size of participants' stands, inclusion in the fair catalogue, business deals, and social gatherings. The second examines the book fair as a tournament of values, or ritual tournament, in terms of its framing, membership and currency. The argument presented is that the currency of copyright is not dissimilar to a form of gift exchange and that, as a result, a book is both commodity and gift. It is in the shadow of the gift that the commodity of the book is produced, distributed, sold and read.

# Keyword

Book fair, Copyright, Gifts and commodities, Publishing industry, Ritual tournament, Values, Visibility

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# An Anthropological Analysis of Book Fairs

Books communicate knowledge and ideas. In so doing they portray a society's culture and facilitate cultural diversity. In printed volume form, a book has an advantage over other communications media in terms of its physical attractiveness, relative cheapness, accessibility, permanence, and overall general convenience (it can be browsed through before purchase, re-read, and carried around) (cf. Clark 2001: 2). Book publishing is the commercial activity of putting books in the public domain (Feather 2006: 1). As a result, it attracts an enormous number of different kinds of authors who want to communicate, and be recognized for, their ideas. One salient feature of the publishing industry *vis-à-vis* other creative industries is the unparalleled number of new products launched every year: approximately 250,000 new titles in the English language alone, with one million titles in print.

The publishing industry exhibits various characteristics common to "creative industries". New products are for the most part untried and untested, so that success is difficult to determine (thereby conforming to the "nobody knows" principle outlined by Caves [2000]). Publishing thus involves high-risk decision-making, with the result that a very small number of books and limited number of publishers account for a large percentage of retail sale volume. Like film studios, fashion houses, record companies and other creative industries, publishers may be defined as: "content-acquiring and risk-taking organizations oriented towards the production of a particular kind of cultural commodity" (Thompson 2005: 15). This definition provides the basis for the split between "creative" and "humdrum" personnel (Caves 2000) since the contents of publishing are cultural and the risks taken by publishing houses are financial. It also leads to the kind of "double audience" issue (Moeran 2006) found in advertising, magazine publishing and so on, in that editors – janus-faced – act as agents for their publishing house, on the one hand, and as friends and supporters of authors, on the other (cf. Powell 1985: 190).

The main difficulties for publishing companies are the acquisition of content and growth. In other words, they have to cultivate authors, on the one hand, and then, in order to publish their manuscripts, pay editorial, production and printing costs – not to mention author advances – up front. It is only several months (usually half a year) later that these costs are recouped – and hopefully profits made – through retail sales.<sup>1</sup> Without capital, therefore, a publisher is unable to increase the number of titles it publishes every year. Unless a

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<sup>1</sup> Journals can be an important financial asset to publishers since they provide up-front cash from subscription paid in advance. The introduction of different payment systems, such as pay-per-view, however, is leading to such income being spread throughout the year.

publisher finds itself with a major hit (like Harry Potter, for example, which is said to have provided Bloomsbury with a £40 plus million bank balance), it must somehow raise money to enable it to keep on publishing more titles every year.<sup>2</sup>

Publishers are more than just intermediaries between authors and readers. They commission manuscripts, and finance their production, marketing, promotion and sales. In the process, they confer authority and add value to authors' works (Clark 2001: 3). In his excellent study of the academic publishing industry, John Thompson uses three analytical concepts in order to help us understand its organization and structure. These are:

1. The *publishing cycle*, referring to the (typically four) stages through which a book moves from contracting a manuscript to finished product, by way of pricing and print runs, stock and reprints, and out-of-print decisions. The publishing cycle is divided into two seasons and for most publishers, the *front list* – that is to say, titles published during the past year – provides the turnover that pays production expenses. Usually, 20 per cent of titles provide about 80 per cent of revenue (Thompson 2005: 16-20). However, what publishers have to do is to develop a *back list* (that is, books more than one year old) whose titles continue to sell and which thereby provide continuous income and enable a publisher to increase the number of titles it is able to publish every year, and so itself to become bigger.<sup>3</sup>
2. The *publishing chain*, referring to the interconnecting organizations involved in publishing, selling and distributing books, where each provides a service valued by the others. The publishing chain is thus both *supply chain* and *value chain*. Each of the links purportedly adds some value along the line, and intermediaries (literary agents, book packagers) may be used to create content. The core activity of a publisher is to acquire content and build a list; to make a financial investment and be prepared to take a risk; to develop content; to assess the quality of a text and ensure that it meets certain standards; and sales and marketing (Thompson 2005: 20-26).

Basically, there are five steps in the supply chain and it is the relationships between parties at each stage that make things work. The first is external, between author and editor, who may well commission

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<sup>2</sup> The word for "publisher" (*verlag*) in German derives from the word meaning "moneymen" – in other words, the person who laid out the necessary sum of money to finance the printing of a book (Weidhass 2007: 35). In England, in the late Middle Ages, publishers were known as stationers who "co-ordinated the work of all the craftsmen who were involved in the production of manuscript books: the scribe, the illuminator, the bookbinder. They were also the suppliers of the paper or vellum on which the book was written" (Feather 2006: 9).

<sup>3</sup> The concept of the "backlist" can be traced back to the second half of the seventeenth century in England and the emergence of the publisher as a distinct entity in the production of books (cf. Feather 2006: 49).

up to 60 titles a year. Then there is the internal relationship between editorial and sales and marketing departments within a publishing company as editors try to sell their book ideas and manuscripts, taking in to account their suitability for the publisher's list, the author's name, the book's USP, as well as its frontlist/backlist potential, and so on (Clark 2001: 85-6). Thirdly, there is the relation between marketing and other publishers (to whom the former sells rights), on the one hand, and between marketing and reps and agents (who distribute and place books in retail outlets), on the other. Fourthly, reps and agents liaise with bookstores/sellers and library suppliers which, fifthly, have relations with their own customers and libraries respectively.

1. The *publishing field*, which is "the structured space of positions in which different publishers, agents and other organizations are located" (Thompson 2005: 16). It is in fact a number of overlapping (sub-)fields, since different kinds of publishing (textbook, trade, academic and so on) are organised in rather different ways, and contains a number of linguistic, spatial and technological properties. Thompson argues that publishers possess four kinds of resources: first, *economic capital* (consisting of accumulated financial resources); second, *human capital* (arising from staff employed and their accumulated knowledge); third, *symbolic capital* (consisting of the accumulated prestige, recognition and respect deriving from publishers acting as cultural intermediaries and arbiters of quality and taste). This helps a publisher to attract, position and promote new books and acquire authors. Symbolic capital therefore underpins relations of trust in the publishing field (Thompson 2005: 33), although authors themselves develop symbolic capital, too. Finally, publishers accumulate *intellectual capital* (arising from the rights that they own or control). The stock of contracts with authors owned by publishers "represents the sum total of rights it possesses over the intellectual content it seeks to acquire, develop and turn into marketable commodities, most commonly books" (Thompson 2005: 34). Indeed, a publisher's main financial assets exist in its access to and control over the intellectual property rights enshrined in contracts – an issue to which we will return in the Conclusion to this paper.<sup>4</sup>

## Book Fairs

Book fairs are just one of a number of different events in which different players in the publishing world participate during the course of acquiring content and taking financial risks. They are important nodal points in the global publishing industry and are located at particular interfaces – type of book (children's, food, travel, etc.), market segment (trade, academic, antiquarian, etc.), and

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<sup>4</sup> Copyright in publishing exists not in ideas *per se*, but in the arrangement of the words in a book: that is to say, in concrete expression (Clark 2001: 58).

geographical dispersion of the industry (Indian composers, Hong Kong printers, etc.) – in the value chain (cf. Skov 2006: 765). An academic publisher, for example, attends the following kinds of events as part of its routine sales activities:

1. *Academic conferences*, where publishers meet (prospective) authors and so acquire editorial content, while also making sales;
2. *Specialist training sessions* – in particular for the development of e-systems;
3. *Librarians conferences*, where publishers can tap into library needs and develop, modify and sell their e-tailing platforms;
4. *User groups* and similar forums (like the Independent Publishers Guild conference), which enable publishers to share their own knowledge and gain knowledge from other groups in the publishing chain.

Book fairs are extremely important for all sorts of reasons.

1. Although held in different parts of the world all the year round, two of the largest international fairs coincide with the *book cycle*: the London Book Fair (LBF) in April, and the Frankfurt Buchmesse (FBF) in October, every year. Publishers thus tend to sell their spring lists at fairs held the previous autumn, and their autumn lists at fairs held in the spring (Owen 2006: 86);
2. Book fairs bring together all members of the *supply and value chains* in the publishing industry, and provide a unique occasion for them to interact face-to-face;
3. Book fairs give a visible structure to the *publishing field*, thereby reinforcing that structure, while making visible the various resources (economic, human, symbolic and intellectual capital) commanded by different publishers in the structured space of positions in which they operate.

The largest (and, some might say, the oldest) book fair is that taking place during the second week of October every year in Frankfurt, the Frankfurt Buchmesse. Together with Leipzig, Frankfurt is said to have had its own book market during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and this developed into a printers' and publishers' bi-annual spring and autumn fair by 1462, soon after the invention of the Gutenberg press (Weidhaas 2007: 25). While trying to trace continuous links between these and contemporary book fairs would be stretching credulity (cf. Flood 2007: 30), some points regarding book fair participants, information and selling procedures should be noted here,

First, there is the question of who attends book fairs. In medieval times, book fairs attracted paper merchants, type-founders, bookbinders, and printers (since it was they who published books) (Flood 2007: 11). However, because they had to travel long distances to exhibit and sell their works to universities, royal courts and fairs, printer-publishers soon availed themselves of the

services of “promoters” who took over these tasks and acted as book dealers (Weidhaas 2007: 31). Others who visited book fairs from the sixteenth century on included authors (like Johannes Kepler, who used the Frankfurt Book Fair to sell his books); and domestic and foreign libraries (Queen Elizabeth I of England regularly arranged for books to be bought at Frankfurt for the Bodleian Library from 1593 onwards) (Weidhaas 2007: 42). Although librarians continue to attend book fairs, authors generally do not, except to put in guest appearances. Another category of visitor no longer found is the academic. Although Frankfurt did not boast its own university, the fair became the regular hunting ground of professors who made purchases on behalf of their universities (Weidhaas 2007: 44). Frankfurt thus became a place where scholars, authors, printer-publishers, and book dealers met to discuss a broad range of topics. As a result, most visitors to the fair travelled to Frankfurt, not just to buy new books (which could in fact be quite difficult), but in order to hear the voices of learned men come together from all around Europe (Weidhaas 2007: 49). It is this “buzz” that still matters at contemporary book fairs, although nowadays it is publishers, agents, reps, distributors, bookstore managers, and technical providers of “publishing solutions” who are the primary frequenters of such events (cf. Bathelt, Malmberg and Maskell 2004).

Secondly, what kind of official information is put out at book fairs? Here, two features of the medieval fair survive in the contemporary international book fair. Lists of books were issued by individual printer-publishers from the late 1460s, while in 1564 the first (incomplete) “Book Fair Catalogue” was published for both Lenten and autumn fairs at Frankfurt. A comprehensive general catalogue, detailing both book titles and publishers and their points of origin, became a regular feature of the fair from 1592. In this respect, the book trade was centuries ahead of all other trades in issuing catalogues advertising its products (Flood 2007: 14). In addition, “Fair Newsletters” (*Messrelationen*) were issued from the 1580s. Published every six months to coincide with the biannual fair, the Newsletter gave details of military events and war-related matters, political and ecclesiastical events, economic developments and legislative changes, as well as nobility gossip, crimes, disasters and wonders (such as comet sightings) (Flood 2007: 22; Weidhaas 2007: 50-51). Although somewhat different in content, in that they focus on the book industry and book publishing world, most large book fairs still publish their own daily Fair newsletters, as well as catalogues of participants (referred to as publishing “bibles”). The LBF also publishes a six monthly magazine called *The Deal* every spring and autumn.

Thirdly, there is a general point about industry sales. The publishing industry is characterised by a somewhat anachronous “sale or return” system of distribution and retailing, whereby any retailer can return an unsold book to a publisher at the latter’s expense and with the expectation of full refunding of the book’s cost. This system emerged out of the institution of the book fair. During the Middle Ages, the book trade was governed by the principle of



buying and selling books only at accredited fairs (Weidhaas 2007: 97).<sup>5</sup> In other words, books were not sold at all between fairs, until the increasing availability of bound books (rather than unbound folios) enabled some more entrepreneurial dealers to travel around the country selling new publications between fairs. This led to the introduction of commission trading, whereby book dealers stocked books in their warehouses and were given credit by publishers who agreed to sell their books conditionally, or on consignment. Books thus remained the property of the publisher until the dealer had sold them (Weidhaas 2007: 108) – a feature that still characterises the contemporary book trade with its “sale or return” system of distribution and retailing.

The book fair, as we know it today, came into existence soon after the Second World War when first Leipzig (1946) and then Frankfurt (1949) re-established its annual fair. Thereafter, there has been a steady increase in the establishment of international book fairs around the world. Warsaw (1956) was the first to host a book fair outside Germany, quickly followed by Belgrade and Toronto (1957), and the Bologna children’s book fair (1964). In 1972, the London Book Fair was set up, followed by another in Buenos Aires in 1974. The 1980s saw a plethora of fairs, starting with Paris’ Salon du Livre (1981), and followed by places as far apart as Istanbul (1982), Göteborg (1985), Guadalajara (1987) and Tehran (1988). In the 1990s, the net spread to the Middle East and Asia with fairs established in Abu Dhabi (1991), Hong Kong (1990), Tokyo (1994), and Beijing (1995), and in the first decade of the new millennium further book fairs have been started in Bangkok (2003), Bucharest (2006), Cape Town (2006), Thessaloniki (2006), Kuala Lumpur (2008) and Vienna (2008) among others cities. The book fair is now an international event by means of which a city becomes “a node in the global mosaic and annual timetable” of publishing (Weller 2006: 111) and the rivalry between fairs found in medieval times still exists today (cf. Flood 2007: 8).

Of these, the Frankfurt Book Fair (FBF), organized by a subsidiary company of the German Publishers and Booksellers Association, is the largest and most important of all. It takes place in the city’s fair grounds (Frankfurter Messe), occupying all twelve halls there, during the second week of October every year (from Wednesday to Sunday). In 2006, it had 7,272 exhibitors, representing 113 countries, showing 382,466 publications, of which 111,913 were new titles. During the fair, there were 2,700 events of one kind or another,

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<sup>5</sup> One difference between the traditional and contemporary book fair is that in the latter only samples of books are exhibited, with orders being taken in advance for contracted delivery later, whereas in the former books were traded directly in bulk. This innovation was instituted in the Leipzig fair from 1897 on (Allix 1922: 557; cf. Skov 2006: 772).

covered by 11,000 accredited journalists from 66 countries.<sup>6</sup> All in all, the fair was visited by 286,621 people, of whom 183,000 were trade visitors.<sup>7</sup>

Although the FBF coincides with the annual announcement of the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature, it is a commercial event and not a festival for writers. It is seen to be *the* most important book fair in the world for international publishing rights, licensing fees and other deals.

“Frankfurt is the ‘grand daddy’ of all book fairs. It is huge and daunting – especially for first-time visitors. I have seen people literally frozen with fear there.”

*Lynette Owen, Rights Manager, Pearson*

The FBF, like many other book fairs, is also a critical marketing venue for the launching of new books, as well as for industry announcements, and provides an opportunity for participants to conduct their own market research on what is being published by whom. It is participated in by all those in the value supply chain – publishers, agents, booksellers, librarians, academics, illustrators, service providers, film producers, translators, printers, professional and trade associations, artists, authors, antiquarians, software and multimedia suppliers.<sup>8</sup>

A number of these book fairs are organized by international event organizers. The Frankfurt Buchmesse itself has been active in starting book fairs around the world, in places like Abu Dhabi and Cape Town, and almost took over the London Book Fair in 2006 after a disastrous move to the Docklands. Another event organizer is Reed Exhibitions which has a portfolio of more than five hundred trade fairs worldwide, and serves 47 key industries ranging from Aerospace and Aviation to Jewellery, by way of Energy, Oil and Gas; Electronics and Electrical Engineering; Sports, Leisure and Health; Travel; and Books and Publishing. It organizes the London Book Fair (and has been doing so since 1986), BookExpo America, BookExpo Canada, the Salon du Livre, the Tokyo International Book Fair and now the Buch Wien fair (from 2008), and works closely with trade associations, city authorities (such as a long-term contract with the city of Vienna to operate and develop the Messe Wien exhibition centre), and government, or semi-government, organizations (like the British Council, with whom it works closely to arrange its annual country themes at the London Book Fair).

Although the Frankfurt Buchmesse has been active in helping establish some of these fairs, not all of them by any means follow the structure of the

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<sup>6</sup> Involvement of the media in trade shows and festivals generally is crucial for both publicity and creation of a positive image of the event in question (Mossberg and Getz 2006: 321).

<sup>7</sup> The fair is open to the general public on Saturday and Sunday only. It is statistics like these which, together with a fair’s reputation, are used in a potential participant’s evaluation of whether or not to attend the FBF (cf. Berne and García-Uceda 2008: 567).

<sup>8</sup> The only people in the publishing world who for the most part do *not* attend book fairs are editors. Authors, too, generally avoid fairs. Informants provided two memorable quotes about having an author at a book fair: “It’s like cows having a guided tour of Smithfield” and “It’s like having Margaret Thatcher joining in an orgy!”

FBF. While some – like the Bologna, London and Guadalajara Book Fairs – have tried to establish themselves as events for international rights, others – like the Warsaw, Beijing and Tehran Book Fairs – are national and cater for local domestic markets, often including the general public. Yet others – like BookExpo America – focus almost exclusively on distribution rights. As a result, publishers and other exhibitors will classify the various fairs rather differently, depending on what they are looking for. Generally speaking, however, it is agreed that Frankfurt is number one in terms of internationalism, followed by London, and then either Bologna (for children’s books) or Guadalajara (for Spanish rights). The FBF is superior to all other fairs because it has a dedicated trade fair site; the local government has invested in the fair, something that is not true of – say – London; and it is extremely well organized.

### Daily Fair Activities

So, what goes on at a book fair, and why do people go there? Clearly, book fairs provide exhibitors and visitors with a highly flexible, cost-effective environment where a wide range of sales and marketing objectives can be achieved – from acquiring a potential bestseller to selling film rights, by way of appointing a new sales rep, building brand image, checking up on what competitors are doing, or even selling one’s company. Most importantly, fairs provide participants with the opportunity to meet face-to-face and thereby to establish and build customer relations.

“Frankfurt gives you a bird’s eye view of the publishing world – of who’s moved on, who’s sold out to whom, and so on. It’s all about relationships. Fairs are the only chance for face-to-face interaction, where we can explain all about our company and what we do. People tend to get confused on e-mail.

“You also build up friendships with people at fairs, but these may yield no direct business benefits immediately, so they may well pass you on to someone else. As a result, with some people, a lot of post-strategizing goes on.”

*Naveen Kishore, MD, Seagull Books*

“A fair is where you put faces to names. At places like Frankfurt and London you meet new accounts. I’ve opened up 20 or 30 over the three years I’ve been with Berg, thanks to the people I’ve met there. A lot of these orders – now worth £50K a year – may come three months down the line, through friends of friends. Like your Singapore contact tells you about Kinokuniya opening up a new store in Dubai, and orders then come that way. Networking is a crucial aspect of any book fair.”

*Veruschka Selbach, Sales Manager, Berg Publishers*

“Book fairs are *hugely* important because a lot of rights business is based on personal contacts, which need to be very long-term so that you become the first port of call when a contact is in search of something. You build up and get to know the tastes of your contacts and therefore to whom to direct a new book’s translation rights in Italy or Venezuela, for example...”

Whatever anyone says, e-mail cannot take the place of book fairs where you have the opportunity to sit down face to face with someone for thirty minutes and have a chat.”

*Lynette Owen, Rights Manager, Pearson*

So, as part of this two-way communication, fairs also provide participants with information:

“Book fairs give you *fresh* news that you’d get on e-mail only one or two months later. You need to *speak* about things with people because talking isn’t as heavy as the written word. This is very important when you’re negotiating, because partners don’t want to write everything down in an e-mail message. To do so is a sign of commitment, and they don’t want that...yet. So you start negotiations, or start a problem, by *talking*. That is what book fairs are for.”

*Fanny Thépot, Systems Manager, Berg Publishers*

There are as many experiences of every book fair as there are people attending it, so that it is impossible to give any one definitive version of what a book fair is and what people do there. Some – like publishers – are more or less rooted to their stands, although they may visit other publishers to discuss, for example, a co-publication or distribution possibilities. Others – like rights negotiators – have just a table and four chairs, with wardrobe and coat hangers, to anchor them. Yet others – like reps, distributors, and bookstores – have no home base, but are on the move all the time. A final group – including service providers – have their own stands, but also go out to meet publishers at their stands in order to try to sell them their services.

“There is a lot of choice when it comes to book fairs, and one could easily attend one a month somewhere in the world. They allow you to sit down, seal deals and learn from others. But how should you attend them? Do you have your own stand, share with others, be part of an agent’s centre, or just go on the hoof and see what happens? The advantage to having your own stand is that you have a home base with a supply of books that you can reach for and show a visitor. But if you’re trying to break into a market with your list, it is more courteous and productive to go to other people’s stands.”

*Lynette Owen, Rights Manager, Pearson*

Publishers vary enormously in the number of people they assign to book fairs. Some large companies have dozens of employees meeting potential customers at tables in their spacious stands. Other small, independent publishers may have just one person fielding every enquiry over three to five days. Berg Publishers, whom I have followed through two book fairs to date, sent two people to Frankfurt (The MD and Sales and Marketing Manager), and the same two people, plus short-term visits by the Journals Manager and Systems Manager for one day each at the London Book Fair. Publishers are more likely, because of costs, to send more employees to their “home” than to an “away” fair.

Different personnel generally participate in different kinds of meetings during the fairs, since they bring different sets of expertise and knowledge to negotiations. Thus, at the 2007 FBF, the Berg MD had half a dozen meetings

concerning the company's US and Australian distribution, both of which have been problematic for some years in terms of turnover, payments and discounts; she also explored the possibility of distribution in Canada. She had various discussions with California, Columbia and Princeton University Presses about the possibility of co-publishing some of the Berg titles. She met an "insane German peddling a fashion dictionary", as well as more reputable publishers from Argentina, Spain and Italy interested in Berg's fashion list, buying rights for the journal *Fashion Theory*, while also trying to sell translation rights of their own book titles to Berg. She had a couple of meetings with companies connected with the supply and archiving of journals for libraries. She had to respond to a data conversion company which was disappointed that it did not get a conversion and editing contract, and met with a digital software provider, as well as a systems developer to find out if the company could build an e-platform for Berg. Finally, she even met a couple of Far East distributors to discuss a forthcoming ten volume encyclopaedia. A week after the Frankfurt Book Fair was over, she wrote and distributed to all members of Berg staff a nine page report on her 28 meetings over three days, together with instructions on who was to act on what.

The Sales and Marketing Manager held 59 meetings over five days, each scheduled for half an hour, from 9 a.m. to at least four in the afternoon. Almost all of these were pre-arranged, although there were one or two additional "drop ins". Discussions between the S&M Manager and her visitors were primarily focused on sales and rights, and again, within a week of the end of the FBF, a twelve page report was circulated to colleagues.

"There are two steps in selling and marketing books. Step one: *listen*. Find out what people are interested in. Don't argue with them. And show them what they want. Step two: figure how to *fulfil their needs* and then describe how a particular title you have will fill those needs. Then they'll buy it!"

*Veruschka Selbach, Sales Manager, Berg Publishers*

She met distributors, reps and bookstore managers from East and South East Asia (14), South Asia (4), (South) Africa (1),<sup>9</sup> Europe (7), Australia (2), the UK (3); the Middle East (4),<sup>10</sup> and the Americas (8). In October 2007, most of these discussions and the S&M Manager's sales pitch focused on new titles published that autumn by Berg. These included a six volume series on *A Cultural History of Animals* (offered at a discount until the end of the calendar year), for which she took numerous orders. The other aspect of her discussions was trying to gauge the demand and pricing level for Berg's ten volume encyclopaedia, due out in the spring of 2010. During these discussions she learned all sorts of relevant and irrelevant information – from the potential for sales to fashion colleges in Argentina to a Russian wanting to invest in independent publishers, by way of internal politics affecting the appointment and effectiveness of a new Director

<sup>9</sup> The S&M Manager was previously employed in a publishing company in South Africa.

<sup>10</sup> Not many people are present from the Middle East because the FBF coincides with the end of Ramadan.

at an American university publisher; the problem of nudity in book illustrations in Middle Eastern countries; remainder deals in the US, the opening of major new stores in Bangkok, Dubai, and Singapore; how to take advantage of libraries and their budgets; the issue of supplementary budgets and committee decisions on buying book products over ¥200,000 in Japan; the possibility of sharing with another British academic publisher the cost of hiring a dedicated rep in the US; and the market and focus area for books in Bellorusse, along with its distribution system.

Although one or two of these meetings resulted in on-the-spot sales (and there is one bookstore owner who comes to the LBF every year and orders somewhere between £5-10,000 worth of books), most of them end up with verbal statements of intent about future purchases of titles. It is, therefore, virtually impossible to say exactly how much business is generated during a book fair, although the general consensus is that it *is* generated. Rights, of course, come in packages and it is simple to work out how many titles have been contracted for translation, film, merchandizing and so on and for how much in each instance.<sup>11</sup> However, rights deals are not necessarily signed and sealed at a book fair:

“The big rights deals are usually *never* worked out at Frankfurt or London, but are agreed a week or two before the fairs. They are then publicly announced when the fair begins.”

*Malcolm Campbell, Chairman, Berg Publishers<sup>12</sup>*

When it comes to calculating costs and benefits of book fairs, however, sales are rather different from rights. What is interesting is that this aspect of a book fair is entirely absent from the voluminous statistics published on the web sites for Reed Exhibitions and the Frankfurt Buchmesse.

“It is very hard to quantify what you get out of a book fair, especially as it becomes established, because a lot of people may well have placed an order the week before or something. So somewhere like Frankfurt is really an opportunity to meet people and get new interest in what you’re doing.”

*Veruschka Selbach, Sales Manager, Berg Publishers*

In summary, what *can* be said here is that a book fair provides opportunities for participants to enter into business negotiations with long-term partners, to gain knowledge through market information exchanges, and to initiate and sustain social relations (cf. Skov 2006: 770). In addition, they let participants observe competitors’ exhibits. This may lead to vertical integration along the publishing supply and value chains, as well as to horizontal interaction among competing firms within the field of publishing (cf. Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006:

<sup>11</sup> Owen (2006) gives a detailed rundown of the various terms that can be negotiated, but a basic rule of thumb for the sale of rights in the academic book sector is ten percent of a publisher’s price, multiplied by print run.

<sup>12</sup> Entwistle and Rocamora (2006: 742) note that, although fashion shows are ostensibly about the selling of clothes, most of the buying occurs beforehand because the shows occur too late in the season.

1001-2). But contrary to the claim made by Maskell and his co-authors, actual trade itself is *not* marginal (cf. Skov 2006: 770).

## Visibility

The trade fair is somewhat similar to the city, since each brings together heterogeneous strangers whose interaction does not depend on a single script. Rather, “multiple actors endowed with individual intentions trace multiple trajectories that interweave to create a spectacle on top of the exhibitors’ displays” (Skov 2006: 773).<sup>13</sup> Still, like a stage play or a fashion fair, book fairs in some respects distract attention from the spectacle they enable. They bring together “geographically dispersed, socially embedded, culturally diffuse sets of companies on a neutral ground on which they re-enact an internal structure that is abstract and relational” (Skov 2006: 768). As part of this internal structural re-enactment, visibility is a major aim on the part of those exhibiting in and attending book fairs. It is important in the *timing* and *location* of a fair; in *where* you have a stand; in the *size* of your stand; in your inclusion in the fair *catalogue*; in the *business deals* that you make; in the *parties* that you put on or attend.

First, timing, location and the framing of a book fair. The two largest international fairs – London and Frankfurt – are timed to coincide with the two publishing seasons starting in March and October. Frankfurt meets this criterion, but London at present does not because it is held in April and is therefore a little late for publishers to set up deals there, since most have been contracted before the LBF. If one takes as an example children’s books, a local publisher needs five to six months to acquire translation rights, get the book translated, ready for printing, and printed copies in the bookshops by September in time for the Christmas season. By holding the LBF in April, this publishing cycle is severely squeezed.

It was for this reason that in 2006 Reed Exhibitions moved the LBF from Earls Court to a new site, Excel, which it also partly owns, in the Docklands area.<sup>14</sup> While the fair was still small enough to be held in Olympia, which was its site for seventeen years, the timing of March was perfect. However, once the LBF grew too big for Olympia in the early 2000s, a new venue had to be found. Earls Court provided the answer, but it also presented a challenge in that that the LBF could *not* be held in March because Earls Court was then the site of the Ideal Home Exhibition, and that particular fair had been in existence for well over one hundred years and its dates were carved in stone.

In order to resolve this issue, Reed Exhibitions proposed that the LBF move to its site in the Docklands. All the big exhibitors agreed and the move was made, with the LBF timed for March again. However, once the fair opened,

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<sup>13</sup> As Skov also points out, the fieldworker at the book fair traces his or her own trajectory in a manner similar to other participants.

<sup>14</sup> Most festivals do not own their event venue (Mossberg and Getz 2006: 319)

everyone began complaining. The Excel site was “in the middle of nowhere”. Not only did it take “forever” to get there; there was nowhere pleasant to wine and dine customers in the vicinity of the fair. As a result, Reed had little choice but to move back to Earls Court and hold the LBF in April as before, so that the LBF shifted both location *and* timing.<sup>15</sup>

All this has to do with visibility in the sense that, since the LBF is the UK publishing industry’s “home turf”, those concerned want to ensure that they look good to visitors from abroad:

“One reason people wanted to stay at Earls Court had to do with status and visibility. Precisely because it is *their* show on *home ground*, so to speak, UK publishers feel that everything *should* be just right. They are concerned with how they are seen by foreign visitors... and that means having good restaurants and watering holes round and about the fair itself. This was where the Docklands move failed.”

*Emma Lowe, Sales Manager, London Book Fair, Reed Exhibitions*

Second, stand location and size. Where an exhibitor has its stand and how big or small that stand is have enormous implications for its visibility in the publishing world. In this respect, book fairs function like “graphs,” in that they chart the relative positions of publishers and other participants in abstract space (Skov 2006: 768).

“Our job is to ensure that *everyone can* be seen. This means that we have to make sure that exhibitors don’t have long runs of walling, or other things like that, that prevent people being noticed. There’s a maximum height, for example. Nothing can be over 4 metres high. And if someone wants to exceed that, they have to go through a lot of administrative procedures that cost both time and money before approval.”

*Emma Lowe, Sales Manager, London Book Fair, Reed Exhibitions*

The importance of stand location and visibility can be seen in pricing mechanisms, where an aisle stand costs less than a corner stand, which itself costs less than a “peninsula” stand (fronting three aisles), which costs less than an island stand,<sup>16</sup> and where from four to five different furniture “sets” or “packages” are available for rental, with different quality tables and chairs, and additional electric and furnishings at the higher end of a price scale that ranges from €158 to €642 at Frankfurt.<sup>17</sup>

“Another aspect to perception is the fact that more and more people are building their own stands at shows. I mean, last year, something like 900 square metres of stand space – that’s 6-7 per cent of the whole show – was built independently

<sup>15</sup> Reed has now managed to hire the second exhibition hall, so that space is not quite at such a premium as before and participants appear to be happier.

<sup>16</sup> At the Frankfurt Book Fair, there is a 10% surcharge for a corner stand, 15% surcharge for a peninsula stand, and 20% for an island stand. A peninsula stand must be at least sixteen, and an island 100, square metres in area.

<sup>17</sup> As Skov (2006: 766) points out, “fairgrounds always carry traces of their own constructedness.”



(although when an architect like my husband has a look, he wonders why they couldn't carry out a proper decent design!). This suggests that appearance and difference are also important. Reed cashes in on providing specially designed sets for foreign exhibitors, like Microsoft, who order in advance and just fly in for the show without having to worry about detail."

Here visibility amounts to a kind of conspicuous consumption, as large, wealthy publishers splash out tens of thousands of pounds on stands which they have had especially designed.<sup>18</sup> The single advantage of this expenditure is that exhibitors can then use the same design and equipment in other fairs around the world and so, in the eyes of the regular fairgoer at least, establish a form of "brand identity". This backdrop of similarity enabling direct comparison of different firms Lise Skov calls "the condition of comparability." She argues that fairs enable publishers to:

Appear free of history, geography and social context; all traces of production are removed from the samples. What is visible at its booth in the fair is only the company's current market position in relation to other companies. Insofar as a company has a reputation, that reputation has to be re-enacted by aid of modular props.

Skov (2006: 767)

Stands thus map out power relations among players both within the field of publishing itself, and between publishing and related fields (cf. Entwistle and Rocamora 2006: 744). Not surprisingly, therefore, certain clear preferences are asserted by large publishing companies with regard to *where* they will exhibit.

"This year (2008), the whole exhibition was planned around Hachette because they were the first to book space with a specific shape and size - three rows back from the main entrance one side of the Main Boulevard. Later Random House came in and wanted a block three rows back, but not on the Main Boulevard opposite Hachette for some reason, but one away. Luckily HarperCollins wanted the free spot opposite Hachette, but we had to consult Hachette about this, of course. And that's a hassle because there are all sorts of subsidiary companies - like Octopus - exhibiting with Hachette, and they all have to be consulted to make sure there are no clashes or anything like that before we get approval for HarperCollins. It took about three weeks to get sorted. It was after that that we could begin to fit together the bits and pieces with other key accounts."

*Emma Lowe, Sales Manager, London Book Fair, Reed Exhibitions*

How, then, is space allocated, when it is at such a premium?

"We have a points system that we use when allocating space to exhibitors. 50 per cent goes for the number of years someone has been coming to the fair, and 50 per cent for the size of the stand they take. It is very difficult to be fair, but we have to try and this is the only way we can do so. We've asked exhibitors who complain to come up with another method of assessment, but nobody has yet done so successfully. We've got to reward loyalty. So far as exhibitors are

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<sup>18</sup> Exhibitors putting up their own stands at Frankfurt have to pay €750 to access the exhibition site from the Thursday before the Fair.

concerned, it's not a question of how many books or rights they sell, but how many years they've been seen to be at an exhibition like Frankfurt or London.

"Basically it's a question of 'squatters' rights'. The trouble comes when one company decides to expand its space a bit, like Wiley wanting the rest of its block next year. Which means that Murdoch, who occupies that space, will have to move out. Not that they know that yet. And that'll mean I will have to start juggling others around. It's a ripple effect. Some of them are happy to be together - like the promotional people, for example - but others, like the publishing solutions firms - freight forwarding firms like DHL, UPS etcetera - really want to be separate."

What is the issue here?

"People are afraid of competitors stealing their clients, or stealing a march on them somehow in ideas they come up with. So there is a of querying that I have to deal with about 'Where is so-and-so located?' because the person concerned does, or does not, want to be located near so-and-so. There's a lot of diplomacy going on here. I mean, I knew all about the Pearson-Penguin buy-up long before it was officially announced because the new company had to have a stand together and plan floor space and design at the next LBF."

*Emma Lowe, Sales Manager, London Book Fair, Reed Exhibitions*

Here we see the reverse side of visibility: invisibility. Companies want to be seen, but only by some and not by others.

A third aspect of visibility at a book fair is the fair catalogue (or *Official Directory*) which is seen to be a kind of Bible, a Who's Who in the publishing world, in which all exhibitors want to be included. The Directory lists all exhibitors in alphabetical order, with each entry including name, stand location, business address, telephone and fax numbers with e-mail address, and an up-to-five-line business description, with up to three names of contact people (who are then listed in a separate Who's Who section in the Directory). It lists the names of all overseas exhibitors and then classifies all exhibitors under product categories (*computer science, conservation and ecology, cookery/food and drink/wine, and so on*). In this way individuals get at least two mentions, and exhibitors three (since they are included as individuals' affiliation in the Who's Who section).

And then, fourthly, there are the book and other industry-related business deals made at the fair. While these can circulate within different segments of the publishing industry (i.e. trade book deals are soon known among trade book publishers, and so on), the book fair daily newspapers give details of deals so that these are disseminated throughout the industry as a whole. Thus, during the London Book, readers of the *Fair Daily* learned about particular company acquisitions, book title purchases, auctions and 'pre-empts', film tie-ins, US and other foreign rights deals, company deals to bring books to mobile phones, appointments of agents, industry awards, digital innovations, and so on.

Finally, there are the parties. Attendees at book fairs are frequently invited to one or other of the numerous parties and receptions held at exhibitor stands - whether to launch a new book, celebrate 100 years in publishing (Mills &

Boone), or just to share their happiness at being there! These receptions are seen to be very important because they provide a relaxed environment in which people can meet one another, exchange information, pick up on gossip, and generally show that they are fully 'paid-up' members of the publishing community. It is important, therefore, that participants in the field of publishing *appear* –that they see and are seen – for parties mark different categories of 'insiders' and 'inside status' (cf. Entwistle and Rocamora 2006: 741). Emma Lowe, the Sales Manager of the London Book Fair at Reed Exhibitions put it this way:

*"Everybody wants to be seen. You're not seen to be successful in a day, of course, so it is all the parties that people go to that are really important – both at the time of a fair and between times... This is crucial, so far as I'm concerned, because it helps me understand the business. I mean, at parties the alcohol flows and people open up and you get to hear all sorts of thing – which can be quite funny when, like me, you're a teetotaler. One reason our move to Excel at Docklands a couple of years ago didn't work was because there were no drinking places to go to. In the publishing world, there's definitely a glass ceiling for those who don't drink."*

## Conclusion

Economic anthropologists have long been interested in how material objects are imbued with qualities whose values cannot be reduced to material necessity or monetary equivalent (Bell and Werner 2004: xi). This is the thrust of the discussion that follows.

The study of values has always been an inescapable element in anthropological theory, although it has rarely been given systematic treatment (Graeber 2001). An exception to this rule is Clyde Kluckhohn who conducted a comparative study of values in five different Indian communities in New Mexico during the late 1950s and early 50s. Kluckhohn's central assumption was that values are "conceptions of the desirable" and that such conceptions influence in some way the choices that individuals make when deciding between different courses of action (Kluckhohn 1951: 395). Values are thus the criteria by which people judge what is legitimate and worthwhile in their everyday lives (Graeber 2001: 3). They are the very stuff of fairs.

In many respects, international book fairs comply with the criteria set out by Arjun Appadurai (1986: 21) in his discussion of what he calls "tournaments of value". These, he says, are:

Complex periodic events that are removed in some culturally-defined way from the routine of everyday economic life. Participation in them is... both a privilege for those in power and an instrument of status contests between them. The currency of such tournaments is also... set apart through well understood cultural diacritics... What is at issue... is not just status, rank, fame, or reputation of actors, but the disposition of the central tokens of value in the society in question. Finally, though such

tournaments of value occur in special times and places, their forms and outcomes are always consequential for the more mundane realities of power and value in ordinary life.

Although Appadurai was primarily interested in the Melanesian *kula* ring as an example of a tournament of value, I myself, some years ago now (Moeran 1993: 87), pointed out that tournaments of value were not confined to activities in the kinds of “primitive” societies studied by anthropologists, but were also to be found in contemporary industrialised societies. My own particular interest was in competitive presentations in the advertising industry, but I argued that tournaments of value also included:

The various *haute couture* and *prêt-à-porter* fashion shows held in Paris, London, Milan, New York, and Tokyo; certain types of auction put on with accompanying publicity by Sotheby’s, Christie’s and other art auctioneers; annual media events such as the Miss World and Miss Universe beauty competitions, the Eurovision Song Contest, the Grammy awards for music, the Oscar awards for those working in the film industry; some art exhibitions and film festivals themselves (in Cannes, Venice, and so on); and, of course, the Nobel prizes.

(Moeran 1996: 93)

I would suggest here that we go back a few decades of anthropological analysis and pluralise Appadurai’s use of the word “value”. In other words, we are referring to a tournament of *values*, since there is no single value held by all the participants with their multiple trajectories at an event such as a book fair. Rather, as was pointed out at the beginning of this paper, the field of publishing is characterised by four kinds of resources. It is in these different forms of economic, social (or human), symbolic and intellectual capital that different kinds of values – or worth (Hyde 1983: 60) – are created, contested and sustained at book fairs. Participants all cite the cementing of social relations as a crucial function of the book fair. They also comment on and are affected by the symbolic dimensions of stand location, stand layout and size, business deals played up through formal and informal communication channels, and parties attended or heard about. Finally publishers are concerned to negotiate the intellectual assets – or creativity – of their authors as business transactions. It is the combination of social, symbolic and creative (or appreciative) values that is then converted from priceless “worth” into price or economic value. It is this equation that is first sketched out, then calculated, negotiated, and agreed upon at the book fair.

It is what participants believe the world of publishing to be like and what they feel they can justifiably demand from that world that is enacted at every book fair around the world. Social, symbolic and creative values can only exist and operate effectively within this web of social relations. Economic value is thus essentially “negative” in the sense that it can *only* take on meaning in contrast and relation to other values (Saussure 1983: 116-8), which may also include the material/technical and utility properties of objects. Together with

the other values cited, these constitute a field of values, the contestation and negotiation of which give rise to (commodity exchange) value *per se* (Moeran 2004: 266-70).

With the recent interest in creative industries, some of these tournaments of values have been studied as “tournament rituals”. Anand and Watson (2004: 75-76), for example, argue that the Grammy Awards influence the evolution of the field of popular music through four processes: the distribution of prestige by means of a “situated” performance; enacting an attention-grabbing event with distinctive symbolic features designed to attract the collective attention of a field; the playing out and resolution of conflicts about the legitimacy of participants in the field; and tightening horizontal linkages among actors within the field.

While book fairs contain their elements of ritual behaviour, they do not shape field evolution to quite the extent argued for Grammy or Oscar awards (Faulkner and Anderson 1987; Levy 1987: 269. It is true that two literary prizes are announced during the course of the FBF – the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade and the German Book Prize – and the Nobel Prize for Literature also coincides with the holding of this fair. Such prizes privilege particular players and construct prestige hierarchies in the field of publishing. They also have an effect upon fiction sales and future advances and contracts, but such an effect is not as comprehensive as are, perhaps, the Oscar or Grammy awards in terms of their influence on commerce and appeal to popular taste (cf. Watson and Anand 2006). Generally speaking, though, major literary prizes are not linked to book fairs.

Nevertheless, in a number of other ways book fairs comply quite closely with Appadurai’s definition of a tournament of values. Here, again, symbolic, social and creative values come into play. First of all, they are complex periodic events occurring in special places, and at special times. They are “both a ritual and a unique event,” a “show” which has a “fixed trysting place” set apart in terms of time, place, setting and props (Malinowski 1922: 85; Baudrillard 1981: 116; Smith 1989: 108-9). With their sealed-in, windowless structure, their special stand constructions and furnishings, exhibition halls separate the book fair from the outside world. They also, as noted earlier, map out in spatial terms the key agents and institutions (different kinds of publishers, rights sellers, service providers, agents, media) within the field of publishing, and so embody that wider field as they produce, reproduce and legitimate both it and the positions of the players therein (cf. Entwistle and Rocamora 2006: 736). As with fashion shows, only those already with an acknowledged position in the field of publishing can gain access to fairs such as the FBF or LBF. *Closure* is thus important, and is affected by a range of boundaries distinguishing various categories of insider from outsider, and policed by gatekeepers who permit or deny access to the fair.

Secondly, the book fair may be seen as a “temporary cluster” (Maskell, Bathelt and Malmberg 2006) or as “social theatre” (Peñaloza 2000) depending

on one's disciplinary inclination. The former enables firms to locate themselves in so-called "communities of practice" and to develop "new nodes of connectivity that link diverse industries" such as film and IT technology (Weller 2006: 118). The latter endows reality with cultural meaning by means of formalized displays and social performances. The underlying message of this theatrical production is that the book equals culture equals civilization.

Both approaches, however, support the view that book fairs serve to define the publishing industry as a *community* (or "family" as it is often referred to), since they provide an embodied space of practice where visibility and mutual recognition lead to a sense of belonging (Entwistle and Rocamora 2006: 743, 749). Book fairs thus involve questions of membership of that community, manage the interpersonal relationships of participants, and to some extent regulate their behaviour (including in-group language and dress codes) (cf. Smith 1989: 51) during what is a series of performances for other industry "insiders."

Finally, although book fairs are removed from the routine of everyday economic life, what goes on there (the selling of rights, the appointment of agents, reps, distributors and so on) has consequences within the more mundane realities of the field of publishing as a whole. The "currency" of book fairs can be said to be the rights stemming from intellectual property assets, since these are the central tokens of value for publishers. Rights are not necessarily subject to laws of supply and demand, since they often depend on personal taste (which is why rights agents spend years and years cultivating personal relations and learning about buyers' tastes). Rights are themselves linked to the status, rank, fame and reputation of both authors and publishing houses, as well as to particular individuals who buy and sell them (hence, Lynette Owen is commonly referred to as "the queen of rights"). Ultimately, however, they depend upon an author's ability to sell a particular book, or series of books.

Copyright - or the right to copy a creative work - is, of course, enshrined in law. But there is more to copyright than its legal and financial repercussions. In his discussion of Mauss's celebrated essay on the gift, Maurice Godelier (2004: 19) distinguishes between selling commodities (which are, as a result, alienable and alienated); giving gift objects (which are inalienable, but alienated); and keeping sacred objects (which thus become inalienable and unalienated). For example, in parts of Melanesia, certain objects (known as *kitoum*) belong to a lineage or individual until launched on a *kula* exchange path and are passed from one recipient to another (as *vaygu'a*). However, such objects continue to belong to the original giver who can, in theory, ask the temporary recipient to return it. In other words, the owner of a *kitoum*-cum-*vaygu'a* cedes the rights of use to enable other gifts to be made, but not ownership as such (Godelier 2004: 15). So certain valuables are alienated, but remain the inalienable property of the original owner.

The parallel here with copyright is obvious. When an author asserts his or her moral right to a written work, s/he implies that creativity involves the immanence of a person (or creator) in a thing (the creative work) – an implication sustained by copyright law (cf. Feather 2006: 162). In allowing publication of her work, the author assigns the right to copy that work to a publisher for a limited period of time, and the publisher then passes on that right, and associated subsidiary rights (abridgements, adaptations, dramatizations and serializations), to others in the publishing chain. These rights usually revert to the publisher and thence to the author after a stipulated period of time, and remain with the author until 50 years after her death, when the work becomes “alienable” – in free circulation in the public domain. Copyright is thus something that is given-while-kept (Wiener 1992). In this respect, the “selling” of rights at the book fair does not completely separate thing from person, but involves an element of giving, since something of the creator remains in the creative work exchanged. Copyright and other property rights thus occupy “a wise middle ground between gift and commodity; they manage to honor the desire for individual enrichment and at the same time recognize the needs of the community” (Hyde 1983: 81 fn).

There is here an irony. In many respects, book fairs spotlight the sale of rights to creative works. In the process, however, they draw attention away from the fact that neither the author nor the person within the publishing industry most involved in the nurturing of the creative process, the editor, generally attends book fairs. Instead, it is those concerned with sales and marketing who circulate and deal in the distribution of rights. Given that commodities must move between reciprocally independent spheres” (Hyde 1983: 201), it would seem that the fair is designed to make visible the book as a commodity and to make invisible the given-while-kept inalienability of the book as a gift. It is in the shadow of the gift that the commodity of the book is produced, distributed, sold and read. Under such circumstances, it is not surprising that participants place such high value on social relations at the fair. They are at the heart of gift exchange (Mauss 1966): it is through exchanges of gifts that spatial proximity (the book fair) becomes social life (the publishing community). As Lewis Hyde (1983: 69) puts it: “gifts bespeak relationship.”

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