



The Association of American University Presses, Inc.
One Park Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10016 · 212 889-6040

AAUP ANNUAL MEETING, JUNE 1975

Address by R. Miriam Brokaw, Associate Director and Editor
Princeton University Press
and President (1974-75) of
The Association of American University Presses

At Princeton we are going to publish a book on the subject of ennui, entitled THE DEMON OF NOONTIDE. Here, at this noon hour, I feel that this label might well apply to me, as I ask your indulgence for a few more minutes. We have talked, we have drunk, we have probably stayed up too late, and we are coming to the end of an exhilarating but also exhausting experience. So if ennui sets in, be patient; this demon of noontide won't be long.

I would like, first, to review the highlights of AAUP activity this past year; second, to present my own thoughts about what university presses may be doing five years from now.

First, then, the past year. It was a rather quiet one--happily, there were no major crises. It was, however, busy. My thanks to the hard-working committees for their steady and productive efforts; to the Board of Directors for its tolerance of a neophyte and its continual helpfulness; to the Central Office for its backing and support. Everyone there has been always and immediately helpful.

Probably one of the most important developments of the past year has been the newly formed National Enquiry, which Chester Kerr has described. We are indebted to the Government and Foundation Relations Committee, for a survey that will attack and may solve many of our problems.

The Copyright Committee has valiantly defended us, presenting our views in Washington and elsewhere, on the thorny issue of photocopying and allied matters. Results are discouraging; differences of views among publishers, librarians, authors are by no means resolved. This is a crucial issue affecting us all, and we are fortunate to have people like Leon Seltzer and Sandy Thatcher presenting the point of view of university presses.

For the first time this year we have given Distinguished Service Awards to nine people who have been, over the years, concerned with scholarly publishing in this country. You will hear more about this at the banquet tonight.

We have continued regional meetings, in my opinion a very manageable and constructive size. For the first time in some years, two will be held on the East Coast this fall, one in the Northeast, one in the Middle Atlantic region. I attended the Southern and Western meetings last fall, and was tremendously impressed by the work accomplished, by the ideas generated. Various workshops have been held; several handbooks--on management and printing abroad--are in the making. The new and effective Educational Directory was ready at the turn of the year. The traveling Book Show is one of our best means of publicity; are we displaying it, when it comes to us, effectively enough on our own campuses, in our own towns? Should we have another traveling show, of our best books on the basis of content?

These are only a few of the activities of the Central Office and the various committees. Jack Putnam and I have visited several presses and exchanged shop talk with the staffs. I think that all of us should be more aware of the Central Office and of the committees that serve us. Do volunteer for service on a committee, suggest workshops to the Central Office, send in experiences worth sharing--in any phase of our work that might be of common interest--to THE EXCHANGE.

Now to the second part of what I want to say: what will university presses be like five years from now? I will try not to make the errors that Alden Whitman did in the recent article in THE NEW YORK TIMES that offended many of us. But in generalizing and also in expressing my own views I know I am opening myself to other errors and raising opportunities for controversy. What will we be like? Further, what should we be like?

I wrote out these thoughts before I came to Indiana. I have found that many of these suggestions have been mentioned here. I hope you will bear, therefore, with some repetition, and tolerate my own emphases.

We are all learning about cheaper, quicker production--essential to our survival. In order to use the new technologies, copy that used to be accepted and economically feasible is now unacceptable. Instead of the contents determining the format of a book, will the content not have to be reshaped to fit the available production techniques? Will not writing a book need to be done with its production in mind? I believe that the burden will often be put on the author to prepare a manuscript ready to photograph. Some of us are already asking authors to provide such copy. Some of us are, in fact, using cottage industry (local people working at home), not just for free-lance editing, but for design, typing, preparing charts, etc. Hot metal is becoming a rarity. Some of us are pioneers in experimenting with films, records, and all kinds of audio-visual material. Some of us are abandoning jackets for all but

a few "bookstore" books. Some are putting footnotes at the back of the book in all cases. Some are using microcards or microfiche placed within the back cover, for material not necessary to all readers. Some of us see nothing wrong with unjustified margins; in fact, at Sunday evening's Book Show we saw how attractive this could be. Some are waging war against over-long books by more often insisting that the fat be cut, and by providing new outlets for small books, such as California's Quantum Books, and others. And what about time? Should it really take 10-12 months to produce an "average" book? This is a matter not just of machinery but of management.

What about the book as physical object? No one who has worked with P.J. Conkwright could not fall in love with beautiful books. But let us hear what has been said at this meeting. Let's take a step at a time. What would happen if we all agreed to issue our books in the humanities, for instance, in the simplest form--even by typewriter offset, without the usual embellishments associated with that discipline? Aesthetic codes change; I am suggesting not lower ones, but different ones. If we all did this, authors and readers might be grateful to have books available at reasonable prices--might, in fact, be grateful that a book judged too expensive to issue in traditional form could be published at all. If we all agreed, we would avoid the problem of competition: of using the traditional appearance of a book to woo authors to our list. Instead, we would be competing, as we should, in new formats. I am sure that not all of us are ready for this suggestion, but the days of luxury are over. We should be challenged to produce handsome books economically. In fact, we should be challenging manufacturers to make innovations so that "cheap is not ugly." We should, as has been suggested here at Indiana, begin to wonder if the book is the best way to disseminate all information. Let us be more daring, as some of us already are, in considering other ways. We are believers in scholarship, not necessarily in the books as its only vehicle.

What will the National Enquiry produce for us in five years? I imagine that one of the important goals will be to convince foundations, research committees, universities themselves, that scholarship is a complete, unified process and that support is needed from research through publication. Will the day come when a professor suggests a subject to a graduate student, when a foundation supports an author's research, only when its usefulness is thoroughly checked out with other scholars and publishers, and only when financial support can be assured through publication? Surely, with all the unpublishable material being ground out, at such waste of time, effort, and cost, this is the only sensible approach? An essential ingredient of our good health in the 1980's is our closer relationship to the sources of scholarly activity and to the various agencies that support it. Roger Shugg said in 1965: "It is no longer sufficient that we should rest content as publishers with being servants of the learned world. We should now work to become nothing less than publishing partners and editorial collaborators with the academic profession."

What will we be publishing? The suggestions I have are not new or startling. Some of us are demonstrating that scholarship is not limited to this continent, by making available--in translation or by copublication--works of scholarship from overseas. Some of us are trying to get more interdisciplinary studies. Some of us are involved in publishing journals, whose life is very much threatened by photocopying. What will happen to journals by 1980? Are there not too many? Some of us have ventured into creative works of fiction, drama, poetry. I believe in the value of all these, and hope we can continue.

However, let me suggest two chief goals of a university press, with which some of you will doubtless disagree: to be on the frontiers of knowledge, providing the research and ideas that will later be translated for the market place, and, second, to speak clearly and objectively on contemporary issues. We have not done badly in the former; in fact, it is our heritage. We have issued books on subjects that have seemed esoteric and specialized at first, and that have later been taken over by the trade. We should present new theories, new discoveries, in all fields. What, though, now happens to the truly important research that has an audience beyond 300 (On Demand Publishing and others may serve the smaller audiences) and, say, 1,000? Some of us have made our minimum print run higher than 1,000 or 1,500 copies. I deplore this. Surely we can find the means--the technical economies, the new formats, the financial backing--to publish superb works in small fields where an assured audience of only 800 people needs the material?

I feel that we have not done as well in speaking out on contemporary issues. I do not believe that our rightful audience is limited to the campus. We should think in broader terms. Did many of us have something to say about the hot and cold wars of our time? How many of us have produced thoughtful books on the environment, on our cities and their problems, on the needs of minorities, or the problems of transportation, on the oil crisis? Who of us have published on our mental institutions, on crime, on drugs, on the problems of population control, especially abroad, on our police system? Are there enough scholarly studies of our government? Finally, who if not university presses should be publishing on education? How many of us are involved in continuing education? Who, in sum, if not we, should be counted on to present objective, careful studies on the major issues of our times? I do not think these matters are the sole province of commercial houses. We should be respected and looked to for having a real voice in these matters. On these matters we would be providing a platform, not a pulpit.

What shouldn't we publish? Can we avoid the precious books that really serve no one but the author? Can we somehow put the quietus on all festschriften? Can we be tough enough to insist that the fat--the repetition, the display of homework done--be removed from our books, so that the padded book becomes extinct? Will the day come when we set our stylistic standards so high that unnecessary jargon is outlawed, when an author may even feel the necessity of having an editor go over his writing before he submits a manuscript?

How many of us will there be in 1980? University presses now number 68 in this country, with 7 foreign members. We seem to keep growing. I imagine that this trend will reverse itself, probably by some regional combinations, as is already happening in New England and Virginia. In fact, are we doing enough--for the sake of economy and efficiency--to combine our resources in such ways as warehousing, order fulfillment, shipping, billing, advertising, sales? John Solon's forthcoming report on joint warehousing and order fulfillment deserves all our attention. Should we have a general AAUP file of free-lance editors? Of free-lance designers, of effective direct-mail procedures? How else can we join forces as a community of presses with a splendid Central Office waiting to be of even more service?

Will our functions be different? I for one do not believe that editors or designers or marketing people or accountants are a vanishing breed. This is a time of real challenge for designers: to keep abreast of changing technologies and to experiment. It has been suggested that the editorial process, in particular, will become unnecessary. I do not believe this for a minute, not until we believe that the style of a book, its internal structure, is unessential; not until all authors become polished writers; not until we believe that the dignity of the English language should be vulgarized. Nor will editors vanish so long as we believe that editors should be entrepreneurs as well as recipients--suggesting books, helping to shape them.

We cannot afford just to bumble along, never open to change, new ideas--even radically new ideas. We have to think five years ahead--at least. Let us consider some of the suggestions I have made. Let us get together and share other ideas. We are a cooperative group engaged in an enterprise that we believe to be important. We can learn from each other. Cooperation is mandatory for our survival.