

TeLDOK report

122E

*One book
at a time*

Print on Demand

Maja-Brita Mossberg

TeLDOK

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TELDOK aims at documenting, as early as possible, working applications of new information systems and arranging study trips and seminars directly related to this task.

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TELDOK

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Cover by PG Holmlöv, pg.x.holmlov@telia.se

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Foreword

Not so very long ago we were contemplating the imminent demise of the printed word under the impact of the new technology. Would the Gutenberg tradition be buried, the bookshelves be emptied and the booksellers disappear when the word, the book, could be produced and stored electronically? Many feared that the death of the Book was imminent.

Today we are asking ourselves the contrary question – will the new technology help us to obtain more easily, more rapidly and perhaps even more cheaply the very book we are looking for? Could it be that electronic storage, production and distribution are going to put new life into publishing and improve the dissemination of books which are neither big sellers nor “best-sellers” and are not written in any of the big international languages?

Maja-Brita Mossberg was commissioned by TELDOK to do the rounds of authors, publishers, producers, booksellers and readers, looking for the answer to this question. During her odyssey, which lasted from January 1997 to the end of March 1998, she collected not one but many answers indicating that the Print on Demand phenomenon developed very quickly during the period in question.

Print on Demand (PoD for short) denotes the rapidly emerging flora of procedures for producing, storing and distributing printed matter with the aid of IT. Our thanks to Maja-Brita for guiding us through the book market in particular.

During its 15 years of existence, TELDOK has printed and distributed a large number of reports and publications in the traditional manner. This time we are practising as we preach, that is, producing on demand. This report is being printed first in a small PoD edition. The main, offset edition will be distributed to our regular readership. Additional copies will then be PoD-produced as orders are received. Mart Marend, whom you will be meeting in the section of this report headed “By return of post”, is helping us with this. Thank you, Mart, for the commendable rapidity with which you produce finished, neatly edited reports from the files we e-mail to you on the island of Gotland.

Last but not least, very sincere thanks to all of you who contributed know-how and viewpoints on the subject of PoD. Without you we would have had nothing to produce even on demand.

We hope you will find this report worth reading, with its new approaches and its cultural policy perspective on technology – one paragraph at a time!

Bertil Thomgren
Chairman
The TELDOK
Editorial Committee

Agneta Qwerin
Member
The TELDOK
Editorial Committee

A word from the author

The term Print on Demand (PoD) has lately come to be used in connection with the production of printed matter which is stored digitally and then printed as needed and asked for. Because digital techniques have proved to make possible the production of books in print runs which, formerly, were too small to be economically justifiable, PoD, during the past year, has also become an established concept in the book market.

It is this particular application – the production of ostensibly traditional paper books in single copies or very small print runs at a reasonable unit price and often with distribution over the Internet – that the present Teldok report is mainly concerned with and confined to. I should add that it has not been my intention – other than marginally – to describe the not particularly new technique which has made PoD book publishing possible. Anyone looking mainly for more detailed technical descriptions, itemisation of the costs of the PoD suppliers' hardware line-up, enumerations of commands for the production of digital manuscripts and suchlike information is therefore liable to be disappointed.

Instead I have tried to shed light on the question of whether digital, tele-borne technology will be able to revive the publication and improve the distribution of books which are not big sellers, do not ride on passing trends and are not written in any of the big international languages. I have done this by describing, from the vantage points of different players, the opportunities opened up by the encounter between the Gutenberg paper book and digital production technology, the complications which arise, the misgivings and expectations which flourish and the rapid development of “the literature-related PoD concept” which has taken place during the period I have spent working on this report.

Maja-Brita Mossberg

I

Introduction

Will digital and tele-borne technology be able to revive the publication and improve the distribution of books which are not big sellers, do not ride on passing trends and are not written in any of the big international languages? That is the basic question in this Teldok report. It cannot yet be answered, but the present situation can be studied in the light of the remarkable development of Print on Demand which has gathered speed during the past year.

A LITTLE ABOUT THE BACKGROUND

Many observers would say that we in Sweden have the most fragile book trade in Europe. Big publishing groups invest heavily in best-selling fiction, in cookery and in gardening books, New Age and IT literature.¹ Big chains of bookstores buy best-sellers by the pallet-load and at heavily discounted prices. Small booksellers cannot afford to buy things by the pallet-load or to stock all the newly published or slightly older books that are not mass-produced and hard-sold. The comprehensively stocked “A-bookshop”, as the term goes, which has committed itself, by contract with the publishing houses, to stocking at least one copy of every newly published title is now a thing of the past. Consequently a reader wishing to browse in and decide about a somewhat out-of-the-way book very often has to choose between ordering it unseen for collection a few days later or going without. If, indeed, that particular book is obtainable in the first place.

HOME-MADE PROBLEMS

Although certain aspects of this development are international, quite a few of the problems are home-made and are due to Sweden in the past few decades having acquired one of the world’s most de-regulated book

1 For example, more than a hundred cookery books have been published in 1997 alone and there is nothing to suggest that the number next year will be smaller. (Source: Svensk Bokhandel 20/97).

markets. The introduction of free book pricing in the early 1970s² has led to a growth of competition, but books have not become cheaper for all the readers who do not rest content with best-sellers, the limited available selection of pocket books or the inadequate freedom of choice offered by the annual book sale.

One good thing about de-regulation, though, is that we can now buy books more spontaneously, for example in department stores and at kiosks, in specialist stores of the Pocket Shop variety or by mail order from a plethora of book clubs. Here again, the selection is limited, added to which, the well-stocked bookshops are steadily declining in number, as they have been doing ever since book prices were de-regulated. Sweden as a whole has about 400 bookshops, 330 of them general booksellers³ and about seventy large specialist shops⁴. Today more than one Swedish municipality in four is without a “real bookshop” and during the first quarter of 1997 there were two bookshop bankruptcies per month⁵.

NOT JUST ANY OLD CONSUMER GOODS

All this really goes to show is that, over and above the effects of de-regulation, the book trade has undergone the same harsh process of structural transformation/rationalisation as many other retail sectors. But good books are not like any other fast-moving consumer goods: if the book you wanted to buy doesn't exist, you don't opt for another “brand”. Then again, in a small language region like ours, most books are unsuitable for mass production and they are not perishable products with a “best before” date coming within the next year or so. And yet the changes which have taken place have given both book publishing and the retailing of books a distinct “mass production and perishable goods focus” which more and more people are coming to regard as a manifest and serious threat to the distribution of a variegated body of quality literature in Swedish.

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- 2 A large number of European countries, Germany among them, apply fixed retail book prices. They wish to go on doing so and have so far been successful, even though the practice is contrary to EU competition legislation.
 - 3 To qualify as a *general bookshops*, a firm's main business philosophy must be to stock and/or otherwise supply what is currently considered a wide range of *general literature*, i.e. fiction for children and adults and non-fiction. Purely educational publications are not included.
 - 4 *Specialist booksellers* cater through their product range – for example, children's books, religious literature and teaching materials – mainly to certain customer categories.
 - 5 Source: Svensk Bokhandel No. 10/97.

NO LACK OF READERS

Despite the diminishing number of well-stocked bookshops and the general pattern of developments, dwindling sales of “narrow” fiction and non-fiction, as well as of classics and titles which came out a few years ago, is often blamed on a readership failure. This argument is impossible to prove while “narrow” quality literature is being made more and more difficult to come by or indeed is not being published at all. Moreover, it is an allegation which the small publishing houses, like the most ambitious booksellers, are desperately working to disprove.

A CHANGING PICTURE

At this stage of things the picture, both in Sweden and internationally, is changing, due above all to two sometimes interactive factors. One of them is the rapidly emerging electronic book trade operating on the Internet and certainly posing an additional threat to the dwindling ranks of players in the traditional Swedish book trade. Secondly there is what I consider to be the still more interesting phenomenon of Print on Demand (PoD) –the digital, tele-borne production and distribution of books which, by all accounts, bids fair to revive publishing and improve the distribution of books which are not best-sellers, are not the product of passing trends and are not written in any of the “big” languages.

CONTENTS OF THIS REPORT

The possibilities of producing, storing and distributing printed matter by means of digital techniques have not been created with book readers and literature in mind and are not new either. Even so, I intend to focus my description on the current situation for books and among other things to show how PoD is making it possible to produce very short print runs – even just one book at a time! – at a fixed and reasonable unit price, a price which at present, using more traditional techniques of book production, would only be obtainable with a print run of many hundreds⁶.

6 There are PoD suppliers who put the upper limit of PoD profitability at 600–800 copies and those who maintain that 300–400 copies is the cut-off point at which the choice between traditional book-printing and PoD hinges on other factors – for example, delivery time or the possibility of amending the text between printings.

– AND ITS POINT OF DEPARTURE

PoD, then – and this is the point of departure of the present report – is capable of improving the current situation for “narrow” newly written fiction, non-fiction and educational literature, for newly published but already pulped literature, for classics and other older literature, for the small – and perhaps also the big – publishing houses, the Swedish book trade, Swedish authors and all the readers whose requirements, for one reason or another, are not being met by the available supply.

REVOLUTION OR MODEST MARKET NICHE?

The question, then, is whether Print on Demand will be used in this way. Will this production and distribution technique of the small print runs bring something of a revolution in the availability and diversity of books, or will the developments which have so conspicuously gathered speed during 1997 be slowed down, so that digital production and distribution of printed matter will continue to be used mainly for a variety of constantly changeable (and commercially more interesting?) user instructions and manuals? This question can presumably be answered in a few years' time, but the present situation can be illuminated by means of interviews with the many more or less enthusiastic interested parties surrounding PoD and paving the path of the book from author to reader.

SIDE-TRACKS

Apart from the more general description of PoD – application, ideas, expectations and criticism – and interviews with various players, I shall be devoting special attention in this report to the development opportunities created by PoD in traditional bookshops. I shall also, unavoidably but marginally, be considering the Internet book trade, the interaction between PoD and the Internet and the copyright issues which are becoming more and more acute in a situation where blockbuster novels and other literary works can be conveyed in a matter of minutes from one corner of the world to another over the telecommunications network.

II

What is Print on Demand?

The term “Print on Demand” covers a rapidly emerging flora of possibilities for the production, storage and distribution of different types of printed matter using digital techniques and processes⁷. Expressions like “unit printing”, “phone for print” and “Book on Demand” are also encountered. Many of the people I interviewed say that “Print on Demand” should be taken to mean not so much “print on request” as “print when needed”.

PRINTING BY OTHER CRITERIA THAN NEED

In this connection – i.e. PoD’s capacity for producing books according to actual need – there is cause to mention that the print runs of books produced nowadays by conventional technology often appear to be governed more by the publisher’s aim of offering the book trade and readers an acceptable unit price than by actual (or even anticipated) demand. Owing to the comparatively high start-up costs connected with traditional book printing, a reasonably acceptable unit price is unattainable with a very small print run. The largest possible print run is also a matter of interest to authors, because their payment is usually geared to the number of books published. Because, as yet, the difference in cost between printing, say, 1,000 or 2,000 copies of a book is so small that by doubling the number of copies one virtually halves the unit price⁸, over-optimistic print runs are common practice.

7 It will be more appropriate to break up the term according to the different stages of the manufacturing and distribution process and to speak, for example, of Non Impact Publishing, Publishing on Demand and Book on Request; further to this point, see the section headed “There aren’t any Print on Demand machines”.

8 – a state of affairs which may possibly be changed by the development, now in progress, of more digitalised offset presses –

AN ONGOING WASTE OF RESOURCES

The unsold books entail transport and storage costs and for the most part are remaindered within a short time (often within two years), after which the surplus – not infrequently more than half the print run! – is pulped within a three-year period. Apart from the repugnant waste of resources involved, this procedure helps to give the Swedish book market the “perishable goods imprint” already referred to, which limits the length of time for which literature in Swedish remains available. This, coupled with the economic gain sought for and attainable through very big print runs, also implies a constraint on quality and a threat to free expression. In addition, as soon as the books are sold out at the publishers, the authors, publishing houses and booksellers are deprived of the demand which – especially where books are concerned – can very well develop in the slightly longer term.

ADJUNCT OR ALTERNATIVE?

Everyone I have spoken to stresses that they regard Print on Demand as an adjunct, not an alternative, to traditional book printing. Nor do they regard the introduction of PoD as a threat to job opportunities in the printing trade. If anything the contrary, because PoD greatly improves the possibilities of printing works which otherwise would not be published in book form. The risk of further job opportunities being lost or (at best) changed lies if anything in the possibility of the two modes of production – in certain respects and looking slightly further ahead – amalgamating. At present, however, there are considerable differences between them:

TRADITIONAL BOOK PRODUCTION

In traditional book production, a limited number of titles are produced in large or very large print runs. The process involves many operations which are performed by skilled personnel and a large array of machinery. Books are printed on large sheets, i.e. paper which is folded after printing, often into 16 pages. Only when one sheet has been printed in the predetermined number of copies (= the print run) is the next one produced. This is followed, among other things, by folding, picking, stitching or gluing and cutting to the right format. Start-up costs are high, not only when printing the first edition of a book but also when printing new editions; the latter, then, also have to be comparatively large in order for the unit price to be acceptable.

PoD BOOK PRODUCTION

With Print on Demand it is possible to produce a very large number of titles in small or very small print runs. Greatly simplified and perhaps a teeny bit idealised, the procedure can be described as putting a diskette into one end of a long machine and, after a few minutes, seeing a finished book emerge from the other end. Much of the preparatory work, as a rule, has been done by the person ordering the book, not infrequently the author, and it has to be admitted that this can sometimes show up in the finished result. The machine⁹ can be operated by one person. The books are printed page by page and copy by copy. So the inside of one book is finished before the next begins. Once the digital original has been paid for, the client can order print runs of any shortness at a fixed and – even allowing for start-up costs – acceptable unit price.

MORE THAN A PRINTING METHOD – AN ENTIRE PROCESS

The special thing about PoD, though, is not just the procedure for the material production of a book. The procedure for conventional book production and distribution can – again, in simplified terms – be described as follows:

From manuscript → to material ready for press (original) → to physical production of books → to physical warehousing → to sale/order procurement → to deliveries of books ordered and stocking in the bookshops → to remaindering decision → to deliveries and sale of remaindered books → to pulping of the last remaining copies.

Note that the process from manuscript acceptance to book release often takes more than a year. In addition, something like three years can pass from the publication date until the remaining books are pulped.

Present-day PoD book production can, with the same degree of simplification, be described as follows:

From manuscript → to material ready for press (original) → to digital storage → to order → to physical production of books → to delivery of books/book ordered and (possibly) stocking, e.g. of one inspection copy, in the book trade.

9 The expression “digital printing press” is frequently used, in spite of the actual machines being a kind of sophisticated laser printer based more on a development of photocopying techniques than on traditional printing technology.

Note that production here is presumed only to occur after the books have been ordered and perhaps also paid for. The entire production process need not take many minutes, so long as the client delivers the original digitally, i.e. on a diskette¹⁰, the print run ordered is a small one and the PoD machine is vacant.

The next stage of development, which is expected to occur shortly in Sweden, involves further postponement of production:

From manuscript → to material ready for press (original) → to digital storage → to order → to digital delivery of the material ready for press → to production by the client or through a PoD supplier in the locality (or country) anywhere in the world where the customer is located.

Note that production at this stage of development may be shifted to the customer/distributor – for example the bookshops, library, university or college, a company or some other organisation – or to a PoD provider near the customer, with all the additional time-saving and environmental benefits which this implies.

TIME SAVING AND SCOPE FOR CHANGES

To all this is added the short delivery time¹¹ which, so far at any rate, is associated with PoD-produced books, as well as the possibility for the author of altering the text/updating the material between printings at no expense or at no expense worth mentioning. These points, of course, are highly interesting in connection with certain books and writing, e.g. material which is aimed at being up to the minute, university set reading composed of excerpts from various texts (with each individual teacher perhaps wanting to compose his or her own compendium) or in the event of a publication like this Teldok report being wanted after one or two years – by which time, very probably, a straight answer can be given to my basic question (concerning the future application of PoD).

10 A more detailed description of the requirements to be met by the original will be found in the next section.

11 – at present a couple of days (or less) after the PoD supplier has received an original ready for press –

III

How it is done

THE MANUSCRIPT

The basic ingredient of book publication, whatever the intended procedure, is a finished and perfectly legible manuscript. This can, in principle, be of any kind whatsoever. It can be hand-written or typewritten (alternative A). It can be written on a word processor/computer and stored on a diskette or some other digital medium, such as a SyQuest¹² (Alternative B). But it can also consist of ready-made paper pages (reflection copy) or pages from a book published previously which can be copied with a scanner and reappear as a “Book on Demand” (Alternative C).

FROM MANUSCRIPT TO ORIGINAL

Paper manuscripts of any kind cannot be put into a digital printing press until they have been converted into computerised originals. The way this is done, and the cost of doing it, will depend on the sort of manuscript which the PoD provider has to start with, which in turn can depend on how closely involved the author/client is in the origination of the text.

ALTERNATIVE A

A hand-written or typewritten paper manuscript nowadays is anything but ideal for book production in general and PoD in particular, because the text has to be typeset – that is, copied/entered into a computer. Typesetting involves a number of decisions concerning with the appearance and readability of the book – page size, the number and length of lines on each page, the choice of types and type sizes, chapter headings, pagination, blank lines, indents and much else besides. Both printing out (including one or more sets of proofs) and design take time. The PoD suppliers I have spoken to offer to take charge of typesetting, but this greatly increases the initial cost and can

¹² SyQuest: originally a trademark, used to denote a kind of portable hard disk with more storage capacity than ordinary diskettes.

jeopardise the publication of long manuscripts in small or very small print runs.

ALTERNATIVE B

The manuscripts best suited for PoD production of previously unpublished books are ready for press from the very outset. As a rule they have been written using a word processing software, transferred to a layout software¹³ and then stored on ordinary diskettes or some other medium appropriate to the scale of the work and/or the supplier's machine line-up¹⁴. If this procedure is applied, origination does not involve the client in any particular expense.

Technical requirements: The PoD providers can accept manuscripts written on a variety of computers (PC and Macintosh). They can make special requirements, such as the original being converted into what is called a Postscript file. If so, the provider will usually explain to the uninitiated how to go about things.

Visual requirements: The original must be designed, which means that the client is responsible not only for proof reading and everything else to do with the content of the text but also for the visual side of things, i.e. illustrations if any and the many other appearance-related decisions which have to do with typesetting (see above). The developments which have just about started in the Magazine Workshops¹⁵ – a number of cultural associations offering their members all the technology needed for digitalised origination – is interesting in this connection. Resources permitting, the aim now is to offer know-how and practical assistance at low cost to other authors as well.

Delivery of digital originals: It is worth adding that the digitalised original can, if so desired, be transmitted to the PoD supplier over the telephone network, either with the aid of a modem and an Internet subscription or else by ISDN cable¹⁶.

ALTERNATIVE C

If a paper manuscript consists of ready pages (which may, for example, have been cut out of a pre-existing book), these have to be co-

13 –for example the commonest word processing software and layout software of the Page Maker and Quark Xpress variety –

14 Different suppliers can have different requirements in this respect.

15 Magazine Workshops exist at present in Göteborg, Luleå, Malmö, Norrtälje, Stockholm and Århus.

16 ISDN: Integrated Services Digital Network. An ISDN cable is a new kind of telephone line with a digital information transmission capacity superior to that of the ordinary network.

pied/scanned, which can be done directly in the PoD machine. The original is then ready for press. The pages of the finished book will look exactly the same as those of the original manuscript and the result will be a kind of facsimile edition. This procedure entails additional expense but can be suitable for short additional print runs. The manuscripts of books printed during the past fifteen or twenty years are, as a rule, already converted into digital originals. Some of these can also be converted for PoD use, but for the most part this involves a good deal of work, and so here again it is common to go by way of copying/scanning of the book pages or reflection copy – that is to say, the reproducible paper originals on which the earlier edition was based. Here again, origination costs are added.

Lastly it should be pointed out that in this report I am referring mainly to books printed in one colour, usually black, and having a simple cover of one or two colours, printed simultaneously with the book. Many people, however, want their books to be given a more exclusive exterior, such as a dust cover printed in several colours and lacquered. The usual practice then is for a separate original to be produced for the cover and a special edition (500 copies, for example) using traditional offset printing.¹⁷ The covers left over after the first edition has been printed are put to one side for future needs.

STATUTORY COPIES AND DIGITAL WAREHOUSING

All printing works are required by law to deliver one copy of the books they print for deposition in the Royal Library and another six copies to the university libraries. Thus, although “first editions” this small will be few and far between, the first PoD edition of a book should comprise at least nine copies: the seven statutory copies, the author’s copy and a master copy to be retained by the printing works. After the first printing, the PoD providers store the digital original in their computers and are thus enabled, during the time agreed on and without any great start-up procedures to produce the number of copies of the book which the customer requires from time to time.

¹⁷ The cost of a more exclusive cover varies depending on appearance and print run. It distinctly raises the price of the finished book.

SALE AND PAYMENT

One fundamental difference between PoD and traditional book production is that the cost of printing/unit price need not be paid before the book has been ordered and perhaps also paid for by its future distributors or readers. In this way PoD makes it economically possible for many more players than previously to publish books at relatively little initial cost (see below). Authors/proprietors may come to act as their own publishers, with all that this implies – among other things, responsibility for marketing and sales. Selling, of course, can employ more personal and unconventional methods and distribution channels as well as conventional ones. Also of interest is the book-vending which takes place through the many web booksellers now operating on the Internet and the other possibilities which authors now have of introducing themselves and their works and accepting orders/payment on the Internet.

BOOK PRODUCTION AND DELIVERIES

The machines which, with the aid of various accessories (e.g. for gluing and trimming), can produce a 200-page novel in just a few minutes represent an amalgamation of techniques originally developed for copying machines and laser printers and, to some extent, for printing presses. The print quality is very similar to offset, and several of the people I have interviewed maintain that only a specialist can tell a PoD-printed pocket edition from one produced by traditional printing methods, always assuming of course that you have a flawless original.

The finished books themselves can be delivered in every imaginable way and through a variety of channels: the individual writer/client can knock on the door to collect his product, the PoD supplier can agree to send the books by courier and mail or C.O.D. to publisher, wholesaler, bookshops, library, individual reader and so on. The actual transport, it is worth repeating, can take place *before* production and by digital means – that is from the PoD machine where the original is stored and over the telecommunications network to another PoD machine owned by the recipient or not far away from him.

COST

The cost of PoD-produced books appears low compared with newly published books but comparatively high in relation to pocket editions. My principal informants, Arkitektkopia in Stockholm and Novum Grafiska in Göteborg, charge by different principles and their prices vary. Studying their offers, however, one finds that someone coming along in the autumn

of 1997 with a ready-designed, digital original (alternative B) or hard copy suitable for copying/scanning (alternative C) and ordering a hundred copies of a 200-page book with a two-colour cover (printed together with the book) would be looking at a unit cost of something like SEK 80, giving a total cost of about SEK 8,000 for the first edition.

Initial costs and the cost of digital storage are spread out over the hundred copies in this example, and so the unit price tends to fall as new orders come in. It also drops (perhaps by SEK 10 or so) if the cover is done in one colour, whereas it rises appreciably if the cover is to be more elaborate (pre-printed in offset) and also if the manuscript or original requires some kind of processing.

But lower prices are rumoured. In an article published in *Svensk Bokhandel*¹⁸ Mats Bellander of KTH (the Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm) maintains that, with the new generation of small machines which are coming on to the market and do not take up more room than a sophisticated office copying machine, a 200-page pocket edition can be printed in less than ten minutes and for about SEK 30¹⁹.

18 No. 10/97.

19 Note that these amounts are not directly comparable with publishers' prices, which also cover the author's royalty, expenses related to manuscript and original (reading and editing work, design, typesetting, proof reading etc.) and marketing and sales overheads. Before the book produced and distributed by traditional means gets to its readers, moreover, the mark-ups, if any, to wholesaler, forwarding agent and bookseller or other distributor have to be added, as well as the accumulated value added tax.

Dollar exchange rate at the time of writing (June 1998): USD 1 ~ SEK 8.

IV

Different ways of looking at it

SOME READER PERSPECTIVES AND TRAINS OF THOUGHT

When discussing the advantages and disadvantages of Print on Demand in a number of reader perspectives, one finds oneself talking about books which are in demand but no longer obtainable and about books which, for one reason or another, need to come out but are unable to elbow their way to the front in today's market. These books can be made available through a development of PoD – which, the enthusiasts maintain, will mean greater diversity and more freedom of choice for us as readers. To this the sceptics object that the problem today is not one of diversity. We already have a copious book output in relation to the smallness of our language area and most of us cannot find time – not even in a lifetime – to read everything we want to and perhaps ought to. Freedom of choice is not the problem either. If anything the problem is how to cope with picking and choosing from the continuous flood of reading matter which the digitalised information society supplies us with nowadays.

But there are also other, slightly more solemn ways of looking at the matter. Expressions like democracy and access to free expression are perpetually cropping up in discussions of Print on Demand, as well as questions concerning the importance of literature for the development and refinement of language. When I talked to Agneta Qwerin, System Manager at the National Tax Board and a member of Teldok's editorial committee, about Print on Demand in various genre and reader perspectives, the following conversation ensued:

MOSSBERG: I guess that you are one of those people today who enjoy reading and read a tremendous amount both at work and in order to keep themselves generally informed but probably don't have all that much time for literature.

QWERIN: Yes, and that's something I feel ashamed about. Sorry and ashamed.

MOSSBERG: Sorry and ashamed? Those are very strong words.

QWERIN: Yes, literature has meant a tremendous amount to me ever since I was a child, browsing in the bookshelves at home. One of my first great reading experiences was *Fältskärens berättelser* (*The Surgeon's Stories*), and I can even remember that the title was printed in red and had a gloriously elaborate initial F. I was eleven then. I still read a lot of literature when my children were small, at night and while feeding them. Later we read to them. Now they are grown up. And the way things are today... I stagger off to bed at about eleven because I have to get up at six in the morning. Much as I enjoy it, there isn't much time to spare for leisure reading. This makes a difference, because I notice that, at times when I'm not reading much literature, my own language gets thinner.

MOSSBERG: Do you mean you *notice it*?

QWERIN: Yes, I'm not just pretending. I need the topping up that literature amounts to. I feel that otherwise I lose something: my power of self-expression, my usage, narrows down, so I wasn't exaggerating.

Few nowadays would deny that access to an abundant and nuanced language is growing more and more important in the society which is emerging, and that all-round availability of reading matter in general and literature in particular is one of the best of implements for developing one's own language²⁰. Relating this exchange with Agneta Qwerin to the possibilities opened up by a Print on Demand, I am instantly reminded of the words of Artur Lundkvist²¹:

“In spite of all amazing inventions, language is and remains mankind's most remarkable and indispensable creation. Language is the very precondition of our superior human awareness. Without language we cannot think or feel completely, for our feelings too are to a great extent determined by our linguistic possibilities for investing them with form and direction. This ought to be self-evident to each and every one of us, and yet it seems not to be so.”

20 – as well as the capacity for adequately assimilating other languages.

21 Quoted from his speech at the 1971 Commemoration Day celebrations of the Swedish Academy.

A delicate task

Is it in the interests of Swedish society to support the publication of quality literature and at the same time new ways of publishing and distributing good books? Yes, that is the dominant persuasion, given the way in which the book market has developed over the past 20 or 30 years. “But,” says Barbro Thomas, Principal Administrative Officer at the National Council for Cultural Affairs and expert adviser to the 1997 Book Commission²², “intervening to support book production is a delicate task for the State. We have frightening examples from other parts of the world. So in the mid-seventies the thing was to find an arrangement whereby the State, and bureaucrats like me, would not be able to control publishing itself. And so the present construction was arrived at and, with a few changes, has really stood the test of time.”

STATE PUBLISHING SUPPORT

The State publishing support introduced in 1975 – after the 1968 Literature Commission had observed that the situation for quality books had greatly deteriorated – is a selective support for individual books in different genres²³. Briefly, the support is intended to cover a certain proportion of the cost of producing the book concerned. Being retroactive²⁴, paid to the publishers after the book has come out, it is deemed not to influence the selection of titles. Certain requirements are attached to the support. For example, the title receiving support must be available for distribution in the book trade, either on the shelves or in a stock list (electronic or printed). In addition, the books must not exceed a predetermined maximum price or – an interesting point where PoD publication is concerned – fall short of a certain minimum print run. The support is distributed by the National Council for Cultural Affairs, while the books to be supported are selected by a number of independent working groups.

22 BOKEN I TIDEN. Betänkande från utredningen om boken och kulturtidskriften. SOU 1997:141.

23 Publishing support is divided into a number of supportive arrangements, such as new Swedish fiction and fiction in Swedish translation, non-fiction, literature for children and young persons, classical literature and literature in immigrant and minority languages.

24 There are a few exceptions: advance support can, for example, be provided in connection with the publishing of classics.

The working group chosen for each support area is salaried by the National Council for Cultural Affairs but is otherwise autonomous and consists of persons with a great knowledge of books, namely scholars, critics, authors, librarians, teachers and experts of other kinds, depending on the type of literature concerned. The working groups are appointed by the governing body of the National Council and their membership is renewed continuously.

FROM MY CONVERSATION WITH BARBRO THOMAS

MOSSBERG: What criteria have to be met for support to be available?

THOMAS: Quality and nothing but quality. The working groups must not concern themselves with the publisher's prosperity or speculate about sales figures. They base their decisions on quality alone. Someone at the secretariat then takes over and enters facts about the book in the computer, which works out the amount of support according to certain rules, based on the sheet remuneration principle, which basically means, the thicker the book, the more money it can get.

MOSSBERG: Is it possible to say what the support can mean in ready money terms?

THOMAS: Some books are very thick and others very thin, but if there were to be an average book I think the support would come to something between SEK 30,000 and 40,000, money that goes to the publishers.

MOSSBERG: In principle, then, authors who are their own publishers can apply for support. But in practice? What is the print run required?

THOMAS: That depends on the category of books we are talking about. As a rule, though, there have to be at least 1,500 copies. The new Book Commission also recommends that books with print runs of more than 6,000 should only receive half the support. But at the same time I think it should be borne in mind that we are a small language area with a comparatively large volume of publishing and that the range of titles is expanding all the time. Where more out-of-the-way titles are concerned, the potential buyers are undeniably quite few in number. So perhaps the print run we've chosen to stipulate is rather on the big side. It is based on the fact that it doesn't really pay the publishers to print smaller editions than this with conventional technology.

MOSSBERG: But the way things are *right now*, then, the conclusion is that it is only authors who can pay the piper themselves, who are in a position to publish their works through Print on Demand, because the small, demand-based print runs that can be involved here put them out of the running for literature support, whatever the quality?

THOMAS: Being an author has never been easy. Being rich is much simpler. Because being able to publish a book is not a self-evident human right;

once the manuscript has been written, you always need money to start off with. In this respect the publishing houses play an important part, for example by sifting out good manuscripts, taking care of the marketing and taking the economic risk.

MOSSBERG: But the fact still remains that there are authors without publishers who are of more literary than commercial interest. If they want to publish through Print on Demand, it is more the exception than the rule for them to have the ready money available. The average annual income of a full-time literary author is well below SEK 100,000²⁵.

THOMAS: Actually I believe that the publishing houses mean still more to the kind of author who writes good books but has never scored a resounding success. Part of the reason for an author of this kind selling a certain, albeit limited number of copies may be that the book looks attractive with its beautiful dust cover and exciting blurb. I'm not at all sure that these authors would get through even to their usual readers if they were to set up on their own and print their books in a half-tatty edition – because we're still to assume, aren't we, that you won't get quite the quality with Print on Demand? Then you have the other side of the matter. The reader. What the National Council has been tasked with supporting is quality literature of *general* interest. So the question is when a print run becomes so small that it cannot really be deemed of general interest. This may be controversial and upon my head be it, but I wonder if it is really a good thing, being able to expand the range of titles indefinitely in a market which is already so saturated. More than 3,000 general titles were published last year. So is it an unqualified blessing, each and every one being able, with the aid of a new technique, to publish his own book? I wonder.

MOSSBERG: A lot of the publishing will of course be things of a more private nature – family histories, fiftieth birthday tributes and that kind of thing – by people who can afford it. But rubbish as well. Though the opposite can also happen. A gigantic digital warehouse full of good books. Both classics and fairly new titles, the sort of thing you can't get hold of in the bookshops or from the publishers, but which – even if plain-looking – can be retrieved and printed as required. More relevant editions could then be printed from the very beginning and the manuscript then put on the Internet or stored in some other database. The reader would then be able to visit the bookshops and ask

25 According to a survey of authors' earnings in 1993, those defined as full-time authors (that is to say, devoting at least 75 per cent of their working time to literary activity) had a median income totalling SEK 116,000 per annum, while the median annual income of full-time *literary* authors stopped short at SEK 84,500.

to buy this or that author's very first or next to last book, which you can't do today.

THOMAS: No. And I think that's where we can see the biggest development potential for Print on Demand. I firmly believe that that kind of technology will eventually get into its stride and that backlist publishing²⁶ will become the most important dimension from a cultural policy viewpoint. Because there is a dilemma in keeping a wide range of publications in stock in a small language area like ours. We simply can't do it. There are any number of interesting classics and slightly older literature – the sort of thing you feel ought to be available in a civilised country! – but which are no longer obtainable in bookshops.

MOSSBERG: Print on Demand is mentioned here and there by the Book Commission.

THOMAS: Yes, and there is a proposal to introduce, as a part of literature support, a new and more flexible supportive arrangement which among other things would encourage innovative forms of publishing.

MOSSBERG: Though of course I am still a bit worried about what will happen to that impoverished author, perhaps a young first-timer, who doesn't cash in on the latest trend and doesn't make it into the best-seller lists but is perhaps a terrific writer all the same.

THOMAS: Of course various, more unconventional solutions are conceivable. We already support self-publishing authors by giving an operating grant to Författares Bokmaskin ("The Authors' Book Machine"), which is intended of course to capture the output previously published by stencil publishers and suchlike; that, in its time, was an unconventional solution. Now the technology has moved on a bit, and perhaps something else is called for. It's certainly possible that some kind of start-up assistance could be constructed and looked on as a kind of venture capital, so long as you define what you are out to achieve. At the same time you have to realise that there are masses of people in the world today – talented people, geniuses, potential Nobel prizewinners! – who never have the chance they would have liked. In my position, of course, I have a soft spot for authors, but the same thing applies to many other people and to life itself. You have to put up with different circumstances, the spirit of the age and God knows what else getting in the way. And I don't really think that's a problem we can solve with new technology.

(18th November 1997)

26 Backlist: a term used by the book trade for books which, though not published this year, can still be ordered from the publishers. The word also denotes a publisher's complete publications from the very beginning, except for this year's releases.

I don't write narrow books

The Swedish Writers' Union has over 2,000 members, among them a more or less famous body of established literary authors. Per Agne Erkelius typifies them in many ways. In spite of twenty or more novels he has written, most of them acclaimed by reviewers, he has had first-hand experience of the book market, like the climate for authors who, one way or another, are not on everyone's lips, changing and growing harsher. But he finds it hard to imagine that the introduction of new technology would bring any decisive improvement.

MOSSBERG: You are one of those who, until very recently, enjoyed the security of having one and the same publisher all the time.

ERKELIUS: Yes, ever since 1961, with one exception. Once or twice I've needed an advance. On that particular occasion my publisher wasn't satisfied with what I was able to show and thought I should put it to one side. But I felt that this was something that could turn out good and that he couldn't really size up the half-finished manuscript. So later on I went to another publisher and they took on the book. It proved to be a success. Among other things it was awarded quite a big money prize by the Academy. But after that excursion I returned to the fold.

MOSSBERG: Which you have been driven out of. That seems to have happened to quite a few authors in the past few years, and one thing they all have in common is that they don't belong to the limited circle writing books that are published in print runs of at least 10,000 and preferably a good deal more. What's the usual print run for your novels?

ERKELIUS: For many years, if I remember rightly, it was 4,000, sometimes with book club sales and pocket editions added. My most successful novel, *Drömmen om Johannes*, went through nearly 80,000 copies. The figure was boosted by more than 40,000 copies being printed as "A book for everybody". But print runs have been diminishing since then. I don't quite remember when it started, but it may have been in about 1990. *Orgelspelaren*, my last-published novel, was printed in 3,000 copies. Exactly how many have been sold I don't know. You get a report every October, but it's so depressing I've stopped looking. It's clear at any rate that the publishers are putting less and less effort into marketing my authorship and that my books are selling less and less.

MOSSBERG: The two are interconnected, of course. I don't think this is the right occasion to delve into the feeling of a war of attrition between authors and the big publishing houses, but that feeling keeps cropping up.

ERKELIUS: Yes, it's there all right, but there is also the authors' own indolence. Perhaps I shouldn't call it indolence, perhaps fear is a better word. The fear of suddenly finding yourself without a publisher. Either way, my latest novel must have sold fewer than 1,500 copies, which is less than half the print run, because I haven't made anything over and above the guaranteed amount²⁷. You can compare this with the situation at the end of the seventies, when several of my books went through 1,200 copies in library sales alone. Nowadays you can be grateful if the libraries buy a few hundred.

MOSSBERG: So you're losing library readers as well? Which logically ought to mean that your library loan compensation²⁸ has also declined?

ERKELIUS: I haven't kept track of that because I have a guaranteed author's benefit²⁹ which is unaffected by the number of books borrowed.

MOSSBERG: So at least you have a firm income. Can you live on it? Or do you, like so many other authors, have to depend on a wealthy or at all events industrious partner?

ERKELIUS: She's industrious. Not wealthy. I couldn't have been a full-time author at all if my wife hadn't borne most of the expenses of our house and home. I couldn't have done it without author's benefit either. Without that I'd have been forced to take at least a half-time job.

MOSSBERG: How much is the guaranteed author's benefit?

ERKELIUS: This year it was SEK 113,500. From that you have to deduct social security charges and income tax. Which leaves half. Perhaps.

MOSSBERG: You've run courses for writers?

ERKELIUS: Yes, but the older you grow the more preoccupied you get with your own authorship. It becomes more and more difficult to really

27 On delivering a finished manuscript accepted by the publisher, the author mostly received a "guaranteed amount" equalling half the royalty which the print run can fetch. The guaranteed amount for a novel with a print run of 3,000 is often about SEK 40,000 or 50,000. On this income, which often represents more than a year's work, the author himself pays social security charges of about 35 per cent plus income tax.

28 Library loan compensation to the individual author, for the lending of works through public and school libraries amounts, under certain rules, to not quite SEK 0.60 (1997) per book lent; this is otherwise known as author's benefit.

29 Guaranteed author's benefits one of the payments made by the Swedish Authors' Fund, which administers and distributes library loan compensation. This benefit is received by upwards of 230 authors, translators and book illustrators (1997).

involve yourself in other people's writing. Sometimes I've been able to salvage my income instead by writing radio dramas.

MOSSBERG: Just to make ends meet?

ERKELIUS: No, definitely not. I've enjoyed it. But I still wonder if I'd have written so much for the radio if... well, there's no telling. But working on a novel...

MOSSBERG: ...is more satisfying?

ERKELIUS: Yes.

MOSSBERG: Do you remember a little oblong brochure that all members of the Writers' Union received last summer? It was about Print on Demand and, rather wittily, was called *A narrow book*.

ERKELIUS: Yes, and I think one should try to avoid the expression "narrow literature" as a means of distinguishing what best-selling authors write and what the rest of us do. Defining a book as "narrow" just because it doesn't go through big editions is misleading, especially when you're talking about books which aren't extreme in any sense but are just as readable and interesting as the pile 'em high blockbusters. I don't write narrow books.

MOSSBERG: I'll bear that in mind. But, to return to the point, what do you know about Print on Demand? What do you think of it?

ERKELIUS: Of course I've read what has been written about Print on Demand in the Writers' Union magazine and in the daily papers, when Curman, Forssell and Myrdal published a number of books³⁰. I think this business of putting a manuscript and your presentation into a database can be very good indeed for someone aiming at a particular audience. Especially where non-fiction is concerned and the reader knows exactly what he wants and can immediately grasp what a book is all about. Another thing which could be encouraging about Print on Demand is that the technology could benefit literature in translation, which sells awfully badly in this country, as soon as it had been translated from a language other than English. This is a kind of literature that just keeps on dwindling, even though the authors are really big names, like the Portuguese writers António Lobo Antunes or José Sarmago. They sell a few hundred copies in the original edition!

MOSSBERG: So you mean that there is a special interest here as well, a small but faithful circle of dedicated readers?

ERKELIUS: Yes, but not where Swedish novels are concerned. There as well perhaps you can target those who are specially interested, but not in anything like the same way. You don't have the same sort of expecta-

30 See next section.

tions. This kind of book has to be looked at. Browsed through. And it has to look nice. Be typographically well-crafted. Searching a database, I'm afraid that either people will search primarily for things they already know about. For example, Myrdal and Forssell. That would make Peter Curman and the rest of us, who are less well-known, just tail-end Charlies. Or else, as a reader, you take a great leap in the dark. In that case the big risk is that of the literary community of authors having been joined by a whole load of *really bad writers*. Because, as I understand it, nobody will do any sifting. Anybody and everybody will be able to put their manuscript and their presentation into the database, and when that happens, how on earth *can* you find your way around?

MOSSBERG: It might turn out that way. Would it be so threatening?

ERKELIUS: It can at any rate result in Print on Demand getting a thoroughly bad reputation and in readers who are not so well up in literature and order more on a hit and miss basis being lured into buying rotten books. After they've discovered what rubbish it is, the danger is that they will lump all literature together and never buy anything again.

MOSSBERG: Is it fair to say then that, although you've now finished your new novel and for the moment have no publisher, you are not specially attracted by the thought of Print on Demand and not all that interested in the idea of setting up as your own publisher?

ERKELIUS: No, I'm *not*. At any rate, not for the moment, and I don't intend becoming my own publisher either, until I'm absolutely forced to. Even though, up till now, I haven't done all that well in the conventional book market...

MOSSBERG: Now aren't you underrating yourself? You've published about twenty novels that have been well received, you have a guaranteed author's benefit and you were awarded a prize by the Swedish Academy... Surely it's more accurate to say that you're being subjected to the same changes as many other authors?

ERKELIUS: Perhaps. Either way, I think I want to go on publishing in the traditional book market.

MOSSBERG: The eye of the needle?

ERKELIUS: Yes, I want to have a publisher with a reputation for good literature. That's a cachet of quality, if you like, in itself. That's one point. The other point, and no less important, we've already been talking about. Money. As my own publisher I definitely couldn't count on a guaranteed payment. And I'm absolutely dependent on that. I can't sit around waiting to get a living from the sale of one copy and then the next and then the next. True, I've no idea what Print on Demand publishing would cost, but whatever the cost I couldn't

afford it, even if I can imagine the profit per copy perhaps being bigger than on a book published in the conventional way.

MOSSBERG: You can decide for yourself what the profit per book is going to be.

ERKELIUS: Yes, and in a way the money would come in faster because you don't have to sell several thousand copies to make ends meet.

MOSSBERG: Yes, but the profit only comes in of course if the book sells. If you yourself are a successful salesman.

ERKELIUS: I wouldn't want to be that. I won't do it. I *can't* do it. Going out and, as I see it, in my serious way presenting what is mine – that is, my authorship and my books... that's something I'm really very fond of doing. But acting as a salesman! I know there are authors who are good at that sort of thing. Or those who, when they visit libraries, always have a small bag – no, a big one! – of their books which they then stand selling. I've never been able to do that. I find it embarrassing in some way. And above all, I think... How old am I now? I think that at the age of sixty-two, you really only have time for writing³¹.

(4th September 1997)

31 Since this interview, Per Agne Erkelius' new novel has been accepted by Wahlström & Widstrand Förlag for publication in the autumn of 1998.

Print on Demand as a real life poem

Peter Curman is an author, a former chairman of the Swedish Writers' Union and current Chairman of KLYS³². It was he who wrote the article published in *Sydsvenskan*³³ which would seem by all accounts to have triggered the development of Print on Demand which began during 1997. That article began as follows:

“The new technology – and above all the Internet – has at a stroke created for literature new distribution opportunities which before long can have the old publishing houses looking like Gutenberg dinosaurs, with their enormous overheads, publishing corridors and rental expenses. ‘Printing on Demand’ has made possible a new and easily manageable book production, linked with national or international databases. And, since people do not have to be publishers in order to use the Internet, authors and critics are likely to have more influence on publishing. I do not claim that authors are going to take over the role of publisher – we will still need different kinds of competence in the future –but I do believe that the new technology can broaden the diversity of book publishing and give us access to literature which the Frankfurt Book Fair, due to its in-built commercial structure, is now forced to exclude.”

MOSSBERG: You started something there!

CURMAN: The cause of all the public interest was *not* Print on Demand. The technique wasn't new, it was being used in sectors where new models keep coming along all the time and you can't maintain enormous stocks of manuals, for example. The same need for change applies to educational literature. Oslo University has been using this updatable printing method for several years and so too, I dare say, have universities in the USA. No, the cause of all the interest if anything was *the connection* between the Internet and Print on Demand and the opportunities for cultural policy. Our world picture has been absurd. The collapse of the Soviet Union took us by surprise. We thought there was a country called Yugoslavia. I call it grotesque, our literature not reflecting the march of world events more adequately. We are now in the midst of a revolution. Masses of new authors have come forward, and in the meantime our own book market is behaving like a supertanker that can't change course, even though the world and the

32 The Swedish Joint Committee for Artistic and Literary Professionals.

33 *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* 23.9.96.

landscape around us have changed. Our cultural life is shot through with Anglo-Saxon popular culture, with mass publication of literature based on the best-seller concept and with a television that is more American than European. So we have to make an effort to strike sparks. See to it that we light fires which illuminate new parts of the world, now that technology is opening up possibilities for presenting literature from other language areas without taking any big economic risks.

MOSSBERG: Let's go back for a minute to how it all started.

CURMAN: My starting point, then, was my belief that among many Swedes there is a growing awareness of vast literary continents out there in the darkness and a curiosity about what is being written. The reason why this literature isn't being published is that experimentation with new literatures involves an economic risk. The publishers say there is no public, and capturing a public can certainly take time.

MOSSBERG: You mean that a public can be captured by posting information about these books on the Internet?

CURMAN: First of all you have to realise that there are very many people indeed who neither can nor will sit clicking a computer, and that the great majority of people, as yet, aren't on the Internet. Even if numbers are growing fast, it will take time before the Internet is as much a part of the Swedish domestic scene as the television set.

MOSSBERG: Nice to hear someone saying it.

CURMAN: All the time we're living in the present and, as I see it, if we can only get started with some kind of niche publishing as an adjunct to traditional publishing... and do it through Print on Demand and the Internet, so that you have a home page with titles to choose from, with samples from the books and other information about them... you can then distribute the books in full text and encrypted form directly to Print on Demand machines at different points in the country. Then all the book trade has to do...

MOSSBERG: So the traditional book trade is involved?

CURMAN: Very much so. I take it for granted that books are to be sold in bookshops and that this can be a way of making the bookshop a more exciting place to visit. The book trade occupies a strong position in all civilised countries, but Sweden isn't civilised in that sense. Most books are no longer being sold in bookshops, which are under tremendous pressure from undercutting by the department stores – the same best-sellers piled high wherever you look! – and different forms of direct selling. And now we have the advent of the Internet booksellers! So as I see it, with this new publishing and all that it can mean for cultural policy, let's take the opportunity at the same time of pulling new customers into the bookshops. Immigrants, for example –

Swedish bookshops are closed to them! It's only exceptionally that they can order books, and even then the whole procedure is often very expensive and very awkward. With the combination of the Internet and Print on Demand, they can gain direct access to the culture and literature of their countries of origin. Then we have the libraries, where certain titles are often missing. With this technology you can, so to speak, repair the gaps in the bookshelves.

MOSSBERG: You are talking both about out-of-print titles and about a new publishing with a cultural policy interest, but as yet, surely, there are no more than just a handful of Books on Demand?

CURMAN: Just you wait! Take our own classics. It's incomprehensible that a country like ours doesn't keep its classics alive, but I can't just walk into any old bookshop and buy them. But there are some interesting projects here as well. In one of them, the Runeberg project, Linköping University is putting the classics into its databank. You can then retrieve the full text of them on the Internet.

MOSSBERG: Do you mean you can order them like Books on Demand?

CURMAN: It will probably take some technical adjustments, but it's perfectly possible. I think we're going to see quite a few instances of this kind of development. The Swedish Union of Playwrights also has an epoch-making project on the boil – publishing the whole body of Swedish drama in Print on Demand. These are texts that haven't been available previously. Most of them have never been published. Before long any theatrical company will be able to get them. This is a literary event and it shows the kind of benefits that this sort of development bears with it.

MOSSBERG: Talking of benefits – values – you've often referred to the democracy aspect. This, as I understand it, means the importance of many different voices not only speaking but also making themselves heard – that is to say, the risk to free expression entailed by the sifting that goes on nowadays, and by the fact that many books, well-received ones included, don't even get through to the whole of the book trade.

CURMAN: Some kind of quality selection *must* be made, not least for the readers' sake. All knowledge that has been handed down in the literary publishing houses, the critical activity that goes on there, the fact of the essential being sifted out of the unessential and books being discussed in a public colloquy – all this, of course, is a great asset. But there is also the danger of tunnel vision. Take poetry, which of course is a genre that hardly ever pays, even for the best-known poets. I've seen cases of brilliant immigrant poets being held back because they don't write in the way that people expect in Sweden.

MOSSBERG: But, going back to how it all started. That article...

CURMAN: Yes, but when you write your articles... people read and say that that was nice, and then it's gone. I am beginning to think more and more that you have to say your debating piece in reality. I've helped to start these big literary cruises³⁴, which were really contributions to a debate... I actually called them "poems from real life" and included them in my listed works as "sea poems". Either way, a debate contribution made in reality has quite a different impact. Suddenly it happens!

MOSSBERG: What happens? I still want to hear about how it all started. In more concrete and practical terms.

CURMAN: After my article, Jurek Waldfogel of Arkitektkopia phoned up and asked if I thought there were authors who were interested in publishing books themselves in small editions. He thought it was odd, the publishers not bothering to also make money out of books in very small editions but being preoccupied with the best-seller concept. Eventually he got me interested in the economic aspects and in the technique itself. Knowing what I did about the possibilities of linking up the Internet with Print on Demand, I saw in my mind's eye a new way of opening up the Swedish market, for example to foreign literature.

MOSSBERG: And then?

CURMAN: We printed a number of books and invited the press to see how it was done. It was Jan Myrdal, Lars Forssell and me. Myrdal needed, among other things, a number of copies of his book *Barndom*, for set reading on a course, and his publishers weren't interested in bringing out such a small edition. Forssell wanted to publish a collection of poems. Arkitektkopia provided the technology and we were in business. Since then Arkitektkopia have printed about 6,000 books – literature, non-fiction and other things – and all the indications are that this is a technique which is going to be used more and more.

MOSSBERG: And you personally?

CURMAN: Altogether I published seven books that are no longer to be had in the bookshops. That way I can keep my books alive for those who are interested. And if not all that many are interested, it doesn't matter.

MOSSBERG: I have the impression that your experiment attracted a good deal of media interest. More than you'd expected?

CURMAN: Yes indeed. But the interesting thing about this movement is that it's international. There's almost more interest abroad. People there

34 During 1992 and 1994, two week-long sea cruises were arranged on which authors from majority and minority populations from the countries surrounding, respectively, the Black Sea and the Baltic, met to discuss questions of common interest and to compare notes on the conditions and responsibilities of authorship.

want to know more about it. I shall be visiting Colombia University in New York in a couple of weeks to talk about the combination of the Internet and PoD. I take part in any number of seminars – I’m going to Bulgaria soon, for instance. It’s all because we have our information on the web. That makes it international.

MOSSBERG: One of your PoD collections of poetry has actually been translated into Turkish.

CURMAN: Yes, and the funny thing is there’s been demand for it! But the fact is, of course, that we have something like 30,000 Turks living in Sweden, and some of them are on the Internet. I only sold 20 or so copies, but all the same.

MOSSBERG: Last time we spoke you’d only sold six.

CURMAN: Well, there you are!

MOSSBERG: How many books have you sold? Altogether?

CURMAN: Not all that many. Folket i Bild/Kulturfront looks after the practical side of things, so I haven’t any proper figures yet. I should think I’ve broken even, but not much more than that.

MOSSBERG: So FIB/Kulturfront has been your PoD publisher?

CURMAN: You could say so, but now we’re going to start publishing on our own to show what we can do.

MOSSBERG: Do you mean the experimental project you’ve just got money for from Framtidens Kultur³⁵?

CURMAN: That’s it. But the working group that we’ve formed doesn’t yet have any publishing competence. We need to find that.

MOSSBERG: Hm. There have been complaints about the design of your books.

CURMAN: We had no intention of taking part in a beauty competition, we were out to show that you can use this technique and do it digitally all the way. But it’s perfectly possible to make beautiful books with Print on Demand. Obviously the preparatory work is just as important for these books as for any others

MOSSBERG: Anyway, is it this new “Print on Demand publishing house” – or whatever it’ll end up being called – that’s going to start building up such a large stock of titles that eventually the whole thing can become a factor to reckon with in the Swedish book market?

CURMAN: Yes, but there’s no need to re-invent the wheel, and so if there is an existing publishing house we can co-operate with, we’ll do so. Negotiations are in progress and this PoD function can actually

35 Framtidens Kultur is a State bursary fund. Författarcentrum Öst (as principal) was allocated SEK 700,000 in the autumn of 1997 for the inauguration of a three-year project aimed at developing new procedures for the publication and distribution of literature. See also the section headed “PODIUM – a joint project”.

provide a boost for the regular activities of the publishing firm involved, because I'm pretty sure that books will turn up that are going to change orbits. If they come to in demand on a bigger scale, production will be switched over to traditional offset.

MOSSBERG: When do you find time to write?

CURMAN: I have a lot on plate at present. I'm also chairman of KLYS, and during Cultural Capital Year the Swedish Government and the UNESCO Council have commissioned us to arrange a world conference for cultural workers on three issues. One theme is the new technology. We are publishing abstracts of the whole proceedings on the Internet, so that delegates' colleagues all over the world will be able to follow what goes on.

MOSSBERG: Yes, but when do you find time to write books?

CURMAN: Then I make myself scarce for a bit.

MOSSBERG: And when is your next book coming out?

CURMAN: There's a novel on the way. It has a previous history which rather fits in here. For one reason or another I fell out with the publisher I'd had for years and years, and I put an excerpt from my future novel out on the web. That was some time ago and I didn't have a Swedish publisher, I was planning to publish it by Print on Demand. Now it may be coming out in America.

MOSSBERG: Never!

CURMAN: Yes, a professional American translator had read this little excerpt, and she wrote to me. Now she's made a translation. It's also coming out in Russia.

MOSSBERG: And in Sweden?

CURMAN: Here I've got a new publisher who has consented to the book being published in two editions – a Print on Demand edition, sold on the web, and an ordinary offset edition. Both versions will be identically priced. Perhaps it isn't strictly business-like, but now I want to test the whole concept.

MOSSBERG: Another poem from real life?

CURMAN: Perhaps. The fact is that a quarter of Sweden's municipalities do not have any proper bookshops. There people will be able to get hold of my book on the Internet, at the same price as in the ordinary bookshop. I also want to test different payment routines. The customers will have to pay first, and they'll get the book afterwards. They can pay over the Internet or by bank or postal giro, and as soon as the payment is recorded I signal Arkitektkopia and they print and distribute the book. I'm going to manage this process myself. As yet it's all a matter of trial and error.

(23rd September 1997)

Full control has never been possible

Copyright law has always adjusted to technical progress, and today it is going through a rapid and complicated process of internationalisation and digitalisation which, in the somewhat longer term, will affect the regulatory structure. One point of contention in Sweden at present is who really has the right to publish books in digital media – a question which is part of the reason why, for several years now, no collective agreement has existed between the respective organisations of authors and publishers. From my conversation with Sara Pers-Krause, Senior Legal Adviser to the Swedish Writers' Union:

MOSSBERG: I realise that the copyright aspects are anything but settled, but

I would still like to ask you what you think may happen in a situation where books are distributed digitally for production by Print on Demand – for example by a printer or in a bookshop – and with parts of them or perhaps complete works floating about on the web for anyone to read or copy. Do you think the law will have to be changed?

PERS-KRAUSE: No, I don't think this is any reason for altering the basic framework of the rules. We can go on using the criteria we have already. On the other hand, and this has always been necessary, as the technology advances, we will have to analyse the principles and concepts connected with proprietary rights and decide how they are to be interpreted in relation to new media and new techniques. For example, what does the copyright term "reproduction right" stand for? Questions of this kind were discussed – inconclusively – at a diplomatic conference last year.

MOSSBERG: So the whole thing is rather in a state of flux?

PERS-KRAUSE: Our law applies. But you have to be realistic and distinguish between what can be vital in terms purely of principle and what is of more practical value. For example, what you *can* charge for. And if you imagine a university library buying just one copy of a textbook and making it available for everyone to read on their screen, at home... then you will have destroyed the economic foundations of that book. Author and publisher are paid for just one copy, which is then read free of charge by thousands of students. It is of course *untenable* to regard that kind of supply as free.

MOSSBERG: But how do you charge?

PERS-KRAUSE: You can look on it as a rental and charge for that. Or construct a form of user licence where the cost is based either on a calculation of how many people have access to the material or of the number of times the material is conceivably going to be used. I think that's going to become quite common.

MOSSBERG: Who draws up these agreements?

PERS-KRAUSE: Appropriately, various copyright organisations, such as ALIS³⁶, which then reports back to the author.

MOSSBERG: And how can compliance be verified?

PERS-KRAUSE: That, of course, is a problem. Work is in progress on the development of technical aids, but of course there are loopholes. There are with most things.

MOSSBERG: Either way, you're talking now about more closed networks, the kind for example that are built up in universities and libraries, companies and organisations, where someone is responsible for the content and you have a fairly limited number of users. But the Internet is different. There anyone wishing to do so can key or scan in copyright material. And anyone can then gain access to it.

PERS-KRAUSE: If someone presents his own text, for example, on his home page, then it's up to that person whether he or she wants to assert copyright or not. But if someone gets in touch with us and wants to use a poem by Tomas Tranströmer, it isn't free. For example, there can be a monthly charge for it.

MOSSBERG: Do people really phone up about that kind of thing?! Do most people even know that every little poem is copyright?

PERS-KRAUSE: No, and that is an educational problem, but nothing new. Not unique to digital media. Any amount of printed material is gingered up with poems. Many people get worked up about this technology and think that this is the first time in the history of the world that unauthorised use has been rife, but that isn't true. There's an enormous amount of pirating. Some of it you can deal with by random checks. Organisations already exist – Bonus, for example – that send people to colleges and other users to check the extent of their copying. Stim (the Swedish Performing Rights Society) sends people to cafés, restaurants and shops, to regulate the use of music. ALIS carries out random checks on the Internet. But full control of unauthorised use has never been possible.

MOSSBERG: So from a control point of view, this is quite a shaky area?

PERS-KRAUSE: On the other hand, with encryption you can do quite a lot to prevent digital abuse. The arrangement could be for every use to be recorded for the work and its author, and also for the user, who is then charged for it. In that case, as a user, you wouldn't be able to get at the work in question without your organisation having signed an agreement or you yourself having access to a code. That's the idea. But it

36 ALIS (Administration of Literary Rights in Sweden) safeguards and asserts the interests of individual literary proprietors.

depends on the technology. There is a lot of research and development going on in this field, and as long as the technical side remains unsolved, most authors have no commercial interest in placing their works on the web. Among other things it impairs their prospects of getting paid through other media. In this respect I think the market forces will play their part, so that in the not too distant future practically all more voluminous literary works will be encrypted. On the Internet as well. And I also believe that, before much longer, better payment mechanisms will be developed which will make it easier to charge per viewing.

MOSSBERG: But this is a matter of non-economic as well as economic copyright. If a literary work is used for purposes and in connections which the author never intended and cannot for the life of him accept? Can anything at present be done about that kind of abuse?

PERS-KRAUSE: Yes, if it is discovered. That's always been the way.

MOSSBERG: Another question altogether is what may conceivably happen in a purely contractual sense if Print on Demand becomes a more accepted way of producing books in small and very small editions?

PERS-KRAUSE: Many different situations would arise. I can very well imagine Print on Demand being a useful adjunct, for example, for the type of book which is out of print and which the publishers aren't interested in reprinting, or the rights in which have reverted to the author, as well as classics and the sort of books that otherwise wouldn't come out. We've also talked about Print on Demand proving useful at the beginning and/or at the end of a book's career. However that turns out to be, I think it's important to think of Print on Demand as an adjunct to traditional publishing, so that it doesn't develop into a technique which undermines what you might call the heavy publishing that enables professional writers to live on their writing.

MOSSBERG: Yes, one wonders what will happen economically when writer and proprietor can no longer count on a predictable print run and just one or two copies are printed at a time.

PERS-KRAUSE: For those who have the time, money and knowledge to act as their own publisher – and seller – I think we can work sensible forms of contract, for example, between author and printer and between author and designer. But if the established publishing houses were to really start using the technology...

MOSSBERG: Surely, that isn't inconceivable?

PERS-KRAUSE: Not at all. It may be in the interests of the publishing houses to use Print on Demand for authors whose books are not expected to go through several thousand copies. If so, a very close watch will have to be kept on the publishers' contributions and obligations. If a publishing house doesn't really undertake to do more than store the

manuscript digitally and then pump out single copies on request, that is without going to the trouble of marketing and distributing the book concerned, then it isn't reasonable that the author should make do with the share of the proceeds that he or she has had previously.

MOSSBERG: Completely different royalty levels?

PERS-KRAUSE: Yes, our attitude is that the author has taken a big economic risk simply by writing the book, without knowing whether it will be published. If the book is accepted, it's the publisher's turn to make certain commitments. Otherwise the economic risk connected with Print on Demand publishing can be minimal for the publishing house, while the author is expected to survive on the occasional pound or two landing in his letter box. To prevent that happening, I think it will be important to keep the two modes of production apart and to establish terms for Print on Demand which will provide a reasonable recompense for what authors and publishers actually do. Otherwise the technique may come to serve as an excuse for publishing houses doing even less in the way of distribution and marketing for authors who don't write best-sellers... and for making print runs even shorter! But here again, you're jumping the gun a bit. Come back in six months or perhaps a couple of years and things will probably have cleared.

(24th September 1997)

Copyright in brief

- With certain exceptions, it is *permissible* to produce single copies of copyright works of literature for private use. It is also permissible to quote short passages from copyright works in texts of one's own, provided the quotations are used as an aid to one's own argument and the source and the author's name are given.
- It is *not permissible*, without permission from the proprietor, to make a copyright work of literature available to the general public; this includes the distribution of copies to the general public and public performance and display of the work, e.g. in public readings, in the education system (where, however, for the most part special conditions have been agreed on) or on a display screen.
- When copyright literary texts are used, the name of the author *shall* be given. Furthermore, the texts may *not* be used in a form or context infringing the literary reputation or individuality of the author.
- Copyright applies up to and including the seventieth year following the year of the proprietor's (author's) death.

One way of adjusting to non-selling

The purpose of writing books is to reach a public. If that public proves minimal, writing and publishing lose an essential part of their meaning. From this point of view, a technique like Print on Demand does not mean much more than an opportunity for authors who are little in demand to adjust to the fact that they do not sell, says Dan Israel, who among other things publishes non-fiction and biography in the venerable house of Norstedts Förlag. “That, at any rate, is my opinion right now,” he adds during our conversation, which has been preceded by a vigorous discussion between colleagues about the price for transferring a previously published non-fiction book to Print on Demand production. From our conversation:

ISRAEL: The interesting thing for us isn't publishing books in print runs of 200, regardless of whether an edition that small can be printed or not. The whole commercial idea of a book publishing house is to publish bigger editions than that, so as to make a living. Where first-time publishing is concerned, I consider Print on Demand uninteresting. At least for a big publishing house. As regards previously published titles, I've just made an experiment, the reason being that I was contacted by someone who wanted seventy copies of a certain book for a study circle. I find that I might be able to produce it for just under SEK 100.

MOSSBERG: That's not bad, is it?

ISRAEL: Perhaps not. But if we were to add our overheads and also turn a profit and then do the whole thing through a bookshop, then with VAT and all the rest of it you could very well be looking at three times that amount. So purely price-wise, it isn't interesting, unless you bypass the book trade, which of course is our main customer. Perhaps you can do that with a small study circle book like this one, but the question is whether Print on Demand would be much of a commercial proposition even then. Perhaps the whole thing could be regarded as a kind of service to the authors and perhaps too – looking a bit further ahead in that case – as a possible way of delivering a book quickly without having it in stock.

MOSSBERG: Some kind of reader service? For unobtainable books, without having to put your name down on a library waiting list?

ISRAEL: Why not put your name down at the library? Suppose you need just one or two copies. In that case the cost will be sky high. Perhaps you can get a not terribly well-printed book for SEK 500 or 600. And even if the initial cost of Print on Demand goes down, there are still various handling expenses to be added. Eventually, when more and more books are stored digitally, perhaps it will get more interesting.

MOSSBERG: But aren't all newly published books stored digitally?

ISRAEL: They are nowadays. But most of the literature which can come into question will still have to be inputted and encoded. Don't ask me how its done.

MOSSBERG: You mean it costs more than it's worth. And that in a situation where I suppose the stipulated return has escalated?

ISRAEL: I think it's a universal truth in the book trade that profitability requirements have risen over the past few decades. This is partly connected with a new generation of owners and a new structure of ownership. Book publishing used to have higher cultural status, a different nimbus from the situation today. The owners want a return on their money, no matter what they've let themselves in for. Cultural ambitions aren't their top priority.

MOSSBERG: We've acquired a best-seller culture.

ISRAEL: Attention nowadays is concentrated on a smaller number of authors. That tendency at the moment is very conspicuous indeed in the Ordfront publishing house which publishes Henning Mankell. I saw it happening at close quarters. I've been able to follow his authorship from print runs of 2,000 to the present situation where the first edition is printed in 150,000 copies. But that development isn't of the publishers' making. I maintain that it's due more to the workings of mass media than to any deliberate intent on the part of book publishers. It only makes them more vulnerable and creates serious problems, especially where literature is concerned, because conceivably many good authors may come along and never get through to their public.

MOSSBERG: That, of course, is the other side of the coin: diminishing print returns for more and more authors, including those who are looked on as established. Book sales. Pulping.

ISRAEL: It applies mainly to an intermediate stratum. A number of titles used to be sold in print runs of between ten and fifteen thousand. That's a lot less common today.

MOSSBERG: That's the context in which authors have grown interested in Print on Demand.

ISRAEL: But their problems will remain. Granted, I can imagine a writer wanting to publish poems and the publishing houses not being interested, so of course he can print a smaller edition than used to be

possible. And in that way, of course, more books can be published. So if you content yourself with writing for 300 people...

MOSSBERG: ...and of course you can't live on that...

ISRAEL: ...and that can't be the point of writing either. I mean, Print on Demand is a way of adapting to not selling. But the purpose of writing is to reach a public. If that public disappears or becomes minimal, then writing loses a great deal of its meaning. This is serious, because without response and feedback, many authors are liable to dry up. Getting published, then, isn't the problem. The problem is reaching one's readers. That's why Print on Demand is no solution. I think there are lots of unrealistic expectations where that technique is concerned. And for the foreseeable future, or at least for the present, the publishing houses have no tenable economic incentives for involving themselves in it. But come back again in a year or so and we'll see.

(5th September 1997)

The fact is, we don't pulp

Anamma Böcker of Göteborg (Gothenburg) is one of the small publishing houses responsible nowadays for publishing an impressive proportion of the titles which rarely grow into five- or six-figure best-sellers but which not infrequently include Swedish first-time writers and Nobel Prize candidates. The firm was started in 1991 by two book-lovers, lawyer Kerstin Aronsson and researcher Annika Persson. They have two full-time employees and nowadays they publish about ten new titles a year, often in print runs of between 1,500 and 3,000 copies. Most of the titles are fiction and non-fiction, with special emphasis on the humanities. Quite a few titles reappear after a year or so in pocket editions, with print runs that have varied between three and thirty thousand.

MOSSBERG: It strikes me that small publishing firms are more interested in Print on Demand than bigger ones. Is there anything in this?

ARONSSON: Possibly. As a small firm you can latch on quickly to new developments. My first reaction was: here comes a completely new way of printing. We talked a lot about this business of small print runs, but ended up with a lot of question marks. For example, how do you cope with the authors' expectations of reaching out to their readers?

MOSSBERG: Is getting your books pulped all that much better?

ARONSSON: The fact is, we don't pulp. Our books are available until the edition runs out. There's also the question of quality. True, there is a certain amount of cheating with hard cover books nowadays, because they're glued, seldom stitched, which of course is debatable from a quality viewpoint. But our books still have hard covers and a designer-created wrapper. It's hard to attain that level of quality with a Print on Demand book. At the same time, in my experience, the great majority of authors are very anxious indeed to publish a "real book". And, looking at our main sales channels, I don't think it will be feasible to introduce a Print on Demand fiction edition as a "real book", either to the book trade or to the book clubs.

MOSSBERG: So the sensual aspect of a beautiful book means a lot to you?

ARONSSON: It isn't only that. I've often discussed technical design with our sales people. We've tried publishing new books in soft covers and slightly smaller format. It wasn't a good idea. Then there is the question of how to make such small print runs a paying proposition. Myself I'm very fond of the idea of making books more readily available, so that people will be ready to try new authors just out of curiosity. The way things are at present, it takes a lot to persuade people to cough up a lot of money for a book they know nothing about. Of course readers would be prepared to experiment more if book prices

went down... and for a long time I hoped that Print on Demand would lead to that kind of possibility. But whichever way I look at it, it's terribly expensive. If you're going to print an edition in that way – for example, a small test edition and then a few copies at a time – the price will be *ridiculous*. And there's another question: just how small can the authors' earnings be allowed to get? Even today, it's rare for anyone to exceed the minimum royalty³⁷, which perhaps is SEK 15,000 or 20,000 for a novel that goes through about a thousand copies.

MOSSBERG: If you're going to have hard covers and a designer dust wrapper, Print on Demand comes out quite expensive. But I think you can get a plain pocket edition of about 200 copies for something like SEK 50 each.

ARONSSON: But even that is *an awful lot of money*. On top of that you have the author's royalty, plus marketing costs and distribution. What our dealers are going to get. That raises the F-price to more than SEK 100 before we, as a publishing house, have been paid one single penny for the editorial work. So the plain pocket edition you're talking about, with VAT and everything included, costs something like SEK 250 in the bookshops. Which is quite unthinkable.

MOSSBERG: Editorial work... do you get many uncanvassed manuscripts coming in?

ARONSSON: I'd say about 400 a year. Mostly Swedish fiction. It takes time. If each of the authors we refuse were to be given a constructive pronouncement, it would take more working time than we've got.

MOSSBERG: How many manuscripts do you usually go for?

ARONSSON: One or two per cent. We actually had four first-time fiction authors in 1997, but that's most unusual. Normally we publish one or perhaps two new authors. Looking to the time aspect, we work on the editorial aspect for between six and twelve months together with the author, who perhaps has been working on his novel for one or two years before that. We engage designers for the dust wrappers and for one or two inserts, but most things we do ourselves. That's part of the editor's job and was one of the preconditions for our being able to start up the firm. On top of this we devote an immense quantity of time – at least half a year – and energy to launching books and editions which the big publishers are no longer going in for and are hardly even bothering to market.

37 Under the standard contract most frequently used, royalty is normally 27.5 per cent of the selling price to the book trade. The royalty base (known in Swedish as the F-price) is reduced for sales to book clubs and book sales.

MOSSBERG: So putting out some kind of small, tentative experimental edition after that kind of investment in time and energy just isn't on?

ARONSSON: It isn't just economically but also *mentally* inconceivable. It would mean questioning our own competence at sifting out good books. Summing up, in my opinion there is no point, in purely economic terms, in publishing a book if you are not pretty sure of being able to sell seven, eight or nine hundred copies. It's only then that you begin to make ends meet. There are cases where you publish books which you know from the very beginning will be a bad business proposition. Perhaps there is an author you are introducing and would like to bank on. Or a very important subject field with a limited readership. But even in cases of that kind we want a technical design acceptable to our sales channels. This doesn't mean that I'm against Print on Demand as such. Everything is changing quickly and every new technique brings new competence. And of course, if you have an edition which is out of print then it can be a good thing, being able to store the book so that you can run off a few copies at short notice. And Print on Demand enables many more people to make themselves heard, which is good for freedom of expression. The only thing is that Print on Demand has come to occupy such a focus of attention during the past year. When a technique attracts that much attention, you have to be careful about what is said outwardly. You have to think about people's souls. You have to make it clear to authors and other people that it is by no means certain that they will reach any readers merely by putting up money. Print on Demand is no salvation. It's far too early yet to strike up any Hallelujah chorus.

(16th January 1998)

A steady stream of classics

Pontes of Lysekil is a publishing house run by former librarian Margareta Marin, who saw for herself at the Göteborg City Library how certain much-demanded classics fell to pieces and could not be purchased and re-lent, while others didn't even exist in Swedish. Fourteen years ago she went over to publishing, specialising in classical literature in translation. This makes her one of the small publishers who not infrequently do their own translating and editing. Year after year a stream of foreign titles enters the market from this little dwelling and publishing house with a view of the sea and with boxes of books in every corner.

MOSSBERG: It strikes me that small publishing firms are more interested in Print on Demand than bigger ones. Is there anything in this?

MARIN: I don't know how other publishers look at it, but I find it very interesting. I'm keen on the chance of being able to invest in an uncertain title without the printing costs being too much for me. It's a possibility that has to do with press freedom. Which gives a better chance to authors no one has dared to back previously, because publishers will be more willing to take a risk.

MOSSBERG: You've just published a book in fifty copies.

MARIN: Yes, it happens to be a new novel by a Spanish author living in Sweden. We'd never have dared publish it the traditional way. In this particular case we were two publishers taking part. We co-operated with Invandrarförlaget, which among other things did the proof-reading and a lot of the marketing. The book is published in Spanish and costs about SEK 100 a time to print.

MOSSBERG: Isn't that terribly expensive?

MARIN: It's a thick novel. With traditional technology it would have cost many times more. And if there should be a sudden upsurge of demand, there's nothing to stop us immediately going over to offset.

MOSSBERG: How do you feel about the technical finish?

MARIN: I'm satisfied. The balance between the head and foot of the page, I grant you, could have been a bit better, but that kind of thing can happen whatever the technology and I can put it right the very next time.

MOSSBERG: As a layman I see no difference between this and other glued books. But how do you intend getting it across to the readers?

MARIN: It's in my catalogue and I'll eventually be doing a home page for the firm on the Internet. And it's already in a home page for the Immigrant Institute. The thing too is to try and get it noticed by the Spanish language immigrant press. To get it out to libraries with a lot

of Spanish-speaking visitors. Perhaps we can get it reviewed by the Spanish press abroad and see if a market develops there.

MOSSBERG: Since you usually publish older classics that anyone is free to publish, you don't normally have any problem about royalties for the author or the survivors. But what about this Spanish author? What will he get for his fifty copies?

MARIN: He has received books equalling more than 20 per cent of the sale value. But this business of forms of contract and Print on Demand is something that needs to be settled quickly. Because I really *believe* in the new technology and hope to be able to probe the market in a similar way with other books. But of course you have to think twice in view of all the work you've put into it, whatever the printing technique. And you have to find quite a few new ways of supporting your books. Because, even if you get very favourable newspaper reviews with the aid of a small test edition, this no longer makes any real difference. On the other hand, there may be a tremendous rush if the book crops up in a television chat show. A few years ago one of my titles was commended in a reading programme as an erotic novel with absolutely no four-letter words. Booksellers from all over the country were phoning like mad the very next morning.

MOSSBERG: But that isn't quite the usual run of things?

MARIN: No. Take one of my very first books, Giorgio Vasari's *Lives of Renaissance Artists*. That's a classic in art scholarship which I noticed people were asking after a lot when I worked in the library. It had come out in the thirties and I realised that when our one and only copy fell to pieces, no one would be able to get hold of it any more. It *needed* to be re-published, and it was one of the books that made me start up as a publisher. Talking of the diminishing importance of reviews, I had orders for four or five copies after a complimentary article in the newspaper Svenska Dagbladet. That was all. But since then it's kept selling all the same, and I've now been selling it for fourteen years.

MOSSBERG: Do you deliver these books from home?

MARIN: Yes. And I don't really have anything against keeping books in stock. There are boxes all over the house. But of course digital storage would be more convenient, and probably cheaper too. Having books in stock isn't free of charge, even if you run the thing yourself. For example, they need to be kept in heated spaces. And the books I've carried! I'm telling you, the day isn't far off when I won't any longer have the strength to go lugging 20 kilo cartons around.

(26th January 1998)

Print on Demand in practice

Universitetsforlaget in Oslo is Norway's biggest educational publisher, with an output that covers all educational levels from compulsory school to university, as well as a more marginal production of general literature. Production Manager Oddvar Fless tells me that interest in Print on Demand – or Publishing on Demand, as they call it – has risen steeply, due not least to the experience gained since the formation, about four years ago, of their Pensumtjeneste AS subsidiary, which produces customised compendia for higher education.

PUBLISHING ON DEMAND

Pensumtjeneste, acting on behalf of Universitetsforlaget and a number of other Norwegian publishing houses, enters articles, chapters or other types of excerpt from previous publications into a database and puts them together into “customised teaching materials” at the request of university and other higher education teachers. The students, who quite rightly used to complain about the high costs of required reading material, now get off more cheaply, at the same time as their teaching materials can be updated or otherwise modified from term to term and from one teacher to another.

THE NEED FOR SMALL EDITIONS

But educational publishers generally, and Norwegian ones in particular, have other needs for printing techniques amenable to short print runs. The main textbook for one subject or another is often accompanied by various “resource units”, such as teachers' guides, answer books or practice books, which it is an advantage to be able to produce on demand. In addition, Norwegian law requires all teaching materials at compulsory and post-compulsory school levels to be produced in both the official languages: *Bokmål* (Dano-Norwegian) and *Nynorsk* (New Norwegian). The necessity of providing for both large and small target groups – New Norwegian is the first language of only about one pupil in ten – has now resulted in Print on Demand attracting the parent company's attention as well. From my conversation with Oddvar Fless:

MOSSBERG: How do you interpret the expression Publishing on Demand?

FLESS: Both as digital production of books and other publications, where the print run, on our own initiative, can be adapted more closely than before to the estimated need, and as production by special request.

MOSSBERG: Have I understood you rightly if I say that at present you distinguish between three separate uses for publishing on demand: firstly, compendia for higher education, with the content as well as the

print run determined by the customer's preferences. Secondly, different types of supplementary material to go with textbooks, teachers' guides and suchlike, the print run for which can be hard to calculate but is usually only a fraction of the main textbook's. And thirdly, providing for the needs of pupils having New Norwegian as their first language?

FLESS: That's correct. Up till now we've mainly used the technique in Pensumtjeneste, but as from 1998 we will also be using it for the production of other teaching materials.

MOSSBERG: Do you have your own machinery?

FLESS: No, we have the database or some other access to the digital originals, but the actual printing we put out to contract.

MOSSBERG: To firms which used to work with advanced copying techniques or to traditional printing firms that have invested in new technology?

FLESS: Both. Perhaps with a preponderance of copy shops, but I think that's changing. Firms are emerging which employ what they call "web laser". That isn't really a copying technique, it's more like a sort of laser printer fed with rolls of paper.

MOSSBERG: Who produces the digital originals?

FLESS: We can do that in-house. Sometimes we order them from the supplier.

MOSSBERG: Do you find it more difficult to produce an original for a Print on Demand book than for a book produced by traditional offset technique?

FLESS: If it's text only, there's no appreciable difference. But as soon as there are illustrations involved, you have to make certain allowances.

MOSSBERG: But Print on Demand still seems to be profitable?

FLESS: Yes, in print runs of up to five or six hundred. With six or seven hundred you might just as well print in the usual way.

MOSSBERG: But prices must still turn out pretty high if you only produce, say, a hundred copies?

FLESS: They'd be higher with conventional technology.

MOSSBERG: In extreme cases, how small are the print runs you might conceivably need?

FLESS: For Pensum's university literature, the print runs are usually less than a hundred. Here at Universitetsforlaget we get very small print runs as well. Take this supplement to a teacher's guide, for example. It consists of a large number of overhead transparencies in colour, put into a ring binder. It's a material we produce ourselves, in-house. So far we've only made ten or twenty copies at a time.

MOSSBERG: Do you expect in future to alternate between different techniques? For example, if there is a sudden upsurge of demand for a

book originally produced as Print on Demand? Or if you decide to produce one or other textbook by traditional technique but in a smaller first edition than usual, so as to switch to Print on Demand for any further orders?

FLESS: So far that hasn't happened. But situations of that kind can very well arise. Sometimes I think we're bound to switch from one technique to the other.

MOSSBERG: Do you ever use digital transport, that is, distribute the originals to Print on Demand suppliers somewhere else in Norway or to suppliers abroad and then print the books there?

FLESS: Not that I know of. But I only know about the production I'm in charge of, and that takes place here in Oslo.

MOSSBERG: You both produce and own the digital originals. What view is taken of the authors' remuneration in a situation where the publishers perhaps only produce a few paper books at a time?

FLESS: Authors and other proprietors are paid by page and by number of copies sold, under an agreement between Pensumtjeneste and the Norwegian Association of Non-Fiction Writers. And some authors have individual contracts.

MOSSBERG: How much of your total publishing at present is Publishing on Demand?

FLESS: Not all that much as yet. Pensumtjeneste has done most of that production. But there will be more in 1998, partly because of very recent developments. The number of Print on Demand suppliers has increased. The technique itself – not least the possibilities of scanning in pages from previously published books with maximum accuracy – has improved. And prices have gone down. So our strategy is that things of which, previously, we printed too much will in future be printed as needed. I can imagine our publishing on demand amounting to fifty, sixty, perhaps seventy new titles already next year. Out of a total output of about 370 titles.

MOSSBERG: Something like 15 to 20 per cent, then?

FLESS: Something like that. Plus a number of new impressions of titles published previously. Apart from the problems which have occurred in connection with digital rights, there are, as I see it, only two factors to bother about: technology and economics. And it is clear that, with the new techniques, we have acquired a better economic foundation for producing short print runs than we had only a year or so ago.

(5th December 1997)

Ready for press or worth printing?

Graphic designer and publishing editor Christer Hellmark, whose book *Bokstaven, ordet, texten* was published recently by Ordfront Förlag, writes: “It is depressing and astonishing how blithely otherwise cultivated and balanced humanists surrender to the new technology and swallow its limitations as readily as its vantages, as if the deficiencies were necessary.” Under the heading (in Swedish) “The Book, Typography and the IT Society”, and by reason of the widespread attention attracted by the three authors³⁸ “Print on Demand démarche”, he published the following thought-provoking observations which we’ve been kindly permitted to reproduce.

“People who love ideas must love words, which means that they [...] must be keenly interested in the way in which words are clothed. The more they think, the more shocked they ought to be by the contradiction between a clear idea and an untidy typography,” said Beatrice Warde, a wise British typography expert in the 1930s.

How wrong she was! I say to myself, leafing through a couple of the publications which the Curman, Forssell and Myrdal trio, to the blare of trumpets, have had photocopied for the general public for 120 crowns.

What is the first thing that comes to mind on being confronted by such a wretchedly proof-read text, laid out on typewriter lines, with inadequate indents for new paragraphs, typeset with fussy nine-point characters on lines ninety characters long (sixty being about the right number)? The spacing is too meagre. The pages, unnumbered, contain well over 4,000 characters (2,000 is about the right number). I am referring here to Jan Myrdal’s *I de svartare fanornas tid*.

What thoughts come to mind? That the book cries out for editing! The need here is for a *book publisher* who, in the presence of the reader, can save the author from himself. There is a need here for a *publishing editor* with the capacity, empathy and red pen to help the author impart structure to the text. There is a need here for a *proof-reader* who can establish consistency, check the spellings of names

38 Curman, Forssell, Myrdal; see the section “Print on Demand means freer expression”.

and correct the computer's word breaks. And there is a need here for a *designer* who can make the text convenient to read, on the principle that it exists for the reader and not as a terminal repository for the author's thought.

The Publishers' Association needn't be too frightened by this *démarche*: it explains better than they can why book publishers are needed.

The 17th century Swedish poet Samuel Columbus wrote in his *Svensk ordskötsel angående bokstafver, ord och ordesätt* that the letters of the alphabet, with their strokes, dots and lines, "as it were copy thought and its interpreter, language". For the task of typography is to make thoughts visible to the eye. The whole thing is a delicate process and the intimate association of reader and author on the book page makes use of subtle stratagems.

When children learn to read from the age of five or six, they are all the time trying to get away from the awareness of the mechanisms of the actual reading process. That aim is achieved when, as habitual readers, we have completely penetrated the formal surface of the text and can go straight to the content. We demolish the scaffolding and enter the building. Reading has become so self-evident we don't think about it, even though we do it all the time.

Ivar Lo-Johansson dreamt of a book which could be read on several chronological planes, on several narrative layers at once. One would be able, as if peeping through a hole, to look into the future of the novel or backwards with some other mystical aid than one's own recollection of what has been read previously. There are similarities, but I think he was imagining something far more virtual than hypertext-linking bundles of information on the Internet. The thing about Ivar Lo's speculations that stirs the imagination most – and he himself must have thought the same – is the impossibility of physically accomplishing such a book.

This draws attention to what Lars Gustafsson, in an article published by Svenska Dagbladet some time ago called "the immaterial book". The book I am holding in my hand, leafing through, reading from, is not the real book, it is just a temporary *depiction* of the immaterial book. The thought can be copied in a variety of forms, in a variety of material media.

The fact of the book looking the way it does at present does not mean that it will always do so. The codex form – the book of pages, as distinct from the roll or the clay tablet – is roughly the same age as our chronology. It's survival is no coincidence: the book, quite simply, is an excellent invention for storing and retrieving information – in many

ways remaining and destined to remain superior to computers, CD-ROM and the Internet.

Typography has a long-wave history: we still print our books with a justified right-hand margin, simply because medieval books were scribed by the monks in straight columns –perhaps they wanted to reflect the strict divine order of existence.

The same goes for the shapes of alphabetical characters – the small envelopes in which typography posts content to the readers. We keep returning to the same old typefaces or to reinterpretations of the old designs: Garamond, Bodoni, Century, Bembo, Berling, Sabon, Galliard.

The digital revolution has not basically changed this, it has only put the old typefaces in the suitcase and moved on, just as in all previous changes of technology.

There is a striking inertia about changes in the realm of the printed, the visual word –and no one has shown that things are going to be any different this time.

Digitally transmitted information has great advantages which will change our way of thinking and communicating in many ways, some of which have yet to be known. But it is depressing and astonishing how blithely otherwise cultivated and balanced humanists surrender to the new technology and swallow its limitations as readily as its vantages, as if the deficiencies were necessary. Their eagerness not to look old-fashioned makes them uncritical.

The typographical limitations of the Internet are certain not dictated by concern for the reader. Only technology buffs can be satisfied with the characters having eight possible sizes, no more, and with the text normally running to the full width of the screen, set in indeterminate standard typefaces which are not controlled by a designer or by anyone else with a knowledge of readability but by the recipient himself.

Now that the quality of many websites has begun to improve, it is mainly because traditional rules of readability are gaining ground – supplemented, at best, with a functional adjustment to the very special conditions of the computer screen. Sometimes it is almost comical: One new way of preserving the text design on the Internet is quite simply by depicting, for example, the pages of a book in a special program and placing them on the web.

The book will survive for a good while yet, have no fear. Not in a bibliophile reserve but in the midst of us. In the midst of society, in the midst of culture, where it has been for the past two thousand years.

(from Ordfront Magasin no. 2/97)

Print on Demand means freer expression

It was no coincidence, Arkitektkopia being quick to involve itself in Print on Demand. Right from the start, the company's operations have been characterised by short, individually customised production runs and highly developed distribution techniques: drawings for different buildings needed not only to be duplicated but also to be distributed, quickly and with a high degree of dependability, to an immense number of players, from developers and contractors to municipal building committees and other public authorities. So the actual logistics – and also, nowadays, the capacity for receiving, storing, delivering and updating digitally – have played a prominent role in the enterprise. This is confirmed by Jurek Waldfogel, who is employed at Arkitektkopia and is a member of the project group set up to develop new forms of book publishing and distribution³⁹.

MOSSBERG: I'm interested in how something starts to happen or any rate gathers speed. Like the breakthrough of Print on Demand, which I suppose can be said to have happened this year.

WALDFOGEL: Yes, we'd had the equipment since 1992 and had also tried launching Print on Demand in the publishing world at a number of book fairs in Göteborg, without anything much happening. It was not until the autumn of 1996, after I'd read an article by Peter Curman, that things began to move. Encouraged by someone going around and wondering about the same things as we were, I got in touch with Peter. We began talking about ways in which we could move ahead with this. The whole thing resulted in the press conference we held at the beginning of this year, where a constellation of three quite well-known authors demonstrated the possibility of producing and distributing their own books. We'd expected perhaps about twenty journalists. More than a hundred turned up. In principle, Print on Demand figured in the media every day for at least a month. Between then and the summer holiday, we produced about a thousand books a month. In print runs ranging from a single copy to 200.

MOSSBERG: What was it like last year?

WALDFOGEL: Not a single book.

MOSSBERG: What sort of books are involved?

39 See the section "PODIUM – a joint project".

WALDFOGEL: Everything from fiction to lighting technology. One author ordered thirty copies of his first book, which was about a man in San Francisco. Now he's publishing another one. This time fifty copies. Together with the Swedish Union of Playwrights we're running a project for publishing about seventy Swedish dramas. We're printing them both as pocket books and as scripts. At the Stockholm University Department of Classical Languages, we have digitalised the required reading in Latin, so the lecturer doesn't have to be lumbered with literature that isn't being used or throw anything away.

MOSSBERG: And what do you do about copyright?

WALDFOGEL: He looks after that. We aren't publishers. We aren't a bookshop either, for that matter. But, getting back to the universities, we're also discussing the possibility of researchers putting their own reports on the web in the form of ready printer files, or ordering material from other researchers all over the world and having it printed here.

MOSSBERG: Is this all good business?

WALDFOGEL: Well, I don't know. Considering what's happened to us over the past half-year, the first thing you can say is that there is a real need for small and very small print runs. Secondly you can ask how many of the books we have printed so far would have been published if we'd been using traditional technology. But I don't mind saying there's been an awful lot of introductory work.

MOSSBERG: You haven't turned much of a profit, then?

WALDFOGEL: There has to be a profit there, of course, if we're going to work with it. I think publishers ought to sit down and think about the business they *aren't* doing. Print on Demand is a kind of production which isn't *instead of* traditional production but *supplements* it – a business opportunity which perhaps will fit in with a few per cent of their titles and which they shouldn't let slip. The method can be used for producing small test editions of new books, printing additional copies of others which are out of print and keeping classics alive. *A Print on Demand book never runs out!* And if the established players see more of a threat than an opportunity in all this, then I'm pretty sure that new players will turn up who think differently.

MOSSBERG: So you believe the paper book has a future?

WALDFOGEL: I do. But I also believe that publishers must seize the new opportunities if they want to keep their readers and get new ones. Otherwise there is a danger of the book-reading public shrinking. An Internet generation is growing up today which is taking in the outside world in quite a different way. How do you get them into the bookshops? How do you get them to start reading books?

MOSSBERG: You consider digital distribution important?

WALDFOGEL: Yes, Sweden has a high level of Internet availability, but there is still no question of everyone having to be on the Internet. If publishing evolves which is available on the Internet, ready-made books will be distributed in different ways. When cheaper machines appear, it's even possible that bookshops, libraries and other places will get their own equipment. Or else local print shops will spring up, producing books from all corners of the world while you wait.

MOSSBERG: In that case you may have helped to start something which you may not have much joy of yourselves.

WALDFOGEL: It was never the intention for us to have any kind of exclusive right. Nor have we. The more players there are in this game the better.

MOSSBERG: What do you yourself think is the best thing about Print on Demand?

WALDFOGEL: Hard to say. There are so many possibilities. Keeping information up to the minute is just one example. We're printing an environmental report for the Federation of Swedish Industries. They have published it on their home page, and there it's updated all the time. Members wanting to have the report in book form just click a square. The order then goes to us. We print the very latest version and send it to them. Looking to the more traditional book market, Print on Demand makes it possible for individuals to publish a book themselves without any censorship. Rather pretentiously, perhaps, we've coined the slogan that "Print on Demand means freer expression".

(22nd September 1997)

Of course, one ought to standardise

Novum Grafiska of Göteborg started off twelve years ago as a traditional printing firm with a modern offset press and the aim of concentrating exclusively on industrial printing and publishing production in black and white. Starting a new business at that point in time, supported by a thorough knowledge of the trade but unburdened by previous investments in older technology, proved, in the event, to be an invitation to further ventures. The company – which today is the parent company of a printing combine – now operates in four places, has ten offset presses and four digital printing presses⁴⁰ and all the other technology for delivering both black and white and full colour, both in gigantic editions and in very short print runs, both on paper and on various digital media, both to the big customer in the building close by and – at astonishing speed – to customers and associates on the other side of the globe. From a conversation with Marketing Manager Lars-Göran Rundqvist:

MOSSBERG: When we spoke to each other nearly six months ago, you'd just sent a small brochure entitled *A narrow book* to the members of the Swedish Writers' Union. I wasn't the only one whose interest was caught by it. Then we met at the book fair, where you demonstrated a digital press which, in a matter of minutes, turned out elegant Strindberg facsimiles, bulky academic dissertations and a previously unpublished manuscript by Vilgot Sjöman. What more has happened? How did 1997 turn out in a Print on Demand perspective?

RUNDQVIST: The most important thing to us was the co-operation we established with SIS⁴¹. We're very proud of the confidence that was then shown in us and in the technology we're using. SIS uses RadioLan to send the originals of its standards – which can be anything from technical data sheets and more exhaustive brochures to bulky manuals – from one of its windows in St Eriksgatan in Stockholm to one of our windows in Hälsingegatan opposite.

MOSSBERG: What on earth is RadioLan?

RUNDQVIST: It's rather like a very small dish. You have two plates, as small as a pocket book. When an editor at SIS has finished his origination, he sends it from their RadioLan straight to ours. From there it goes straight into the server for the digital press. What this means is that we are eliminating the whole of their stock of printed matter – 15,000

40 – the most advanced of which, Xerox Docutech 6180, turns out 180 pages a minute –

41 SIS: Standardiseringsen i Sverige, Swedish Standards Institution.

different standards which are frequently updated. They will now be stored in a database and printed out on demand. There will also be parallel publication of the material, if the customers want it, on other media. They can get it on line – transmitted to their own computer – or on the Internet. They can get it through other kinds of network, on CD-ROM and so on. And that's not all. We have also been represented in IPN⁴², a global network for printers. That gives us access to production units practically everywhere in the world. The affiliated firms offer their customers similar services and products and maintain compatible machine line-ups, which means that the appearance and quality of the customers' printed matter will be the same, no matter where in the world it is produced. We ourselves, for example, will be introducing about five million pages of text for Scania through our colleague in Sao Paulo, which will mean big savings in terms of through-put times, warehousing costs and transport.

MOSSBERG: You're quite a long way ahead, aren't you?

RUNDQVIST: Yes, I'd say we are.

MOSSBERG: And what about more literary output?

RUNDQVIST: Nothing much has happened there. Although, basically, there's no difference between producing a handbook for industry and an ordinary book, we haven't been looking in that direction lately. Our publishing output as it is makes up about 25 per cent of our turnover. In Stockholm we've been chartered by Liber and put in charge of their in-house printing, as well as one or two items of book production, both offset and digital.

MOSSBERG: In that connection, have you published any literature for particular courses? I mean compendia with short print runs and with the teacher, not the publisher, deciding what those particular students are going to read in that particular term?

RUNDQVIST: No, we haven't been asked to. But we could very well do it. It's narrow. It's precise. And then if a book of that kind turned out to be in demand on a bigger scale, we'd change the technology. That's our strong point here, switching easily between different techniques. You can print a small test edition digitally to find out whether that particular book is marketable. If it turns out to be a success, you change to offset.

MOSSBERG: Can you still use the same original?

RUNDQVIST: Of course.

MOSSBERG: Has anyone commissioned a test edition of that kind?

42 International Printers Network.

RUNDQVIST: Not yet. But there's a lot of talk about it. On the other hand we have produced one or two titles in very small first editions, right down to twelve copies. But with print runs that short it's very difficult to give the customers a good price and to turn a profit. Mainly because of all the many discussions – about paper quality, format, margins, typography and all the rest of it – you get about every original when the client isn't professional enough. It's seldom a matter of just receiving the diskette. But of course one ought to standardise an awful lot.

MOSSBERG: Design a few templates to choose from?

RUNDQVIST: Exactly. But we haven't got round to it. Not enough resources.

MOSSBERG: You're less enthusiastic now than you were half a year ago?

RUNDQVIST: Yes, we gained a lot of contacts through our distribution of *A narrow book* and at the book fair. But the way things are looking at present, I'm more guarded. Producing one book at a time and then sending it hither and thither costs more, I think, than it's worth. It'll be a different matter if publishers start thinking more like industry when they're uncertain of a title. If they start really cutting down on their stocks. Avoiding scrappage. If they keep a small stock in trade, based for example on a print run of two hundred, and then top up as required. When that happens we'll also be interested. But everything today is happening so fast it's almost uncanny. So I may well have changed my mind again in six months' time, depending on where technology leads us.

(19th February 1998)

There aren't any Print on Demand machines

Mats Bellander, technical adviser to the printing industry and seconded on a half-time basis to the Royal Institute of Technology (KTH) for research into printing production management, patiently helps to instil some order in the vocabulary which has begun to emerge. At the same time he gives me a glimpse of the background and a few glimpses of what is going on and is perhaps in store. Here are some excerpts from our conversation:

PRINT ON DEMAND

BELLANDER: Print on Demand isn't a machine. It isn't a technology. It's a business strategy. You can also say that Print on Demand is an application of Non Impact Printing. An application which means that you can print what you need for the moment. As a printer or publisher you maintain a very small stock indeed, for example not more than twenty copies on the shelf. And then you print another twenty when the stock has fallen to five. Or else you don't keep any stock at all. As a bookseller you can decide to stock a few copies of this book, to have just an inspection copy of this one and to have this one in the catalogue only. The advantage is that you can deliver quickly in spite of having less stock and having less capital tied up.

NON IMPACT PRINTING

BELLANDER: It's misleading to talk about digital printing methods. "Electronic printing" is a more appropriate term, because the copying techniques which can be used for Print on Demand are not necessarily digital but are always electronic. Electronic printing, then, is a broader, more serviceable concept. "Non Impact Printing" is clearer still – more closely defined and descriptive.

MOSSBERG: You mean printing presses which neither print nor press?

BELLANDER: Yes, the term shows that we're not talking about printing in the accepted sense. But we mustn't get bogged down too much in machinery or technology. Even today there are a large number of variants, from ink jet printers to high speed colour printers, and new variants are appearing all the time, which you can get to print hundreds of pages in the right order. Then all you need is a little after-treatment and you have a book.

MOSSBERG: Print on Demand is already such a well-established term that I'll permit myself to use it. But I take it that for the sake of clarity one ought rather to speak of **Non Impact Printing** as regards the actual printing procedure, **Publishing on Demand** in the publishing trade

and **Book on Request** when the technology meets the consumers, for example in the bookshop or in the library.

A LITTLE ABOUT THE BACKGROUND AND WHAT'S GOING ON

MOSSBERG: As you know, I'm speaking here mainly about fairly simple pocket books in single colour print.

BELLANDER: Then, as far as technical progress goes, we're back to the beginning of the eighties, when I already came across high speed black and white printers capable of producing small editions of thick documents in a very short time. That's how it started. But the coming thing in today's printing industry is digital printing in colour. We're talking about a kind of colour printer, high speed printers, with a big output capacity.

MOSSBERG: Does this mean that before long we can get children's books and non-fiction in full colour by Print on Demand?

BELLANDER: I think one or two things of that kind have arrived already. But what is no less interesting is the technology with digital printing at one end and traditional offset at the other which is also up and coming and I think is going to dominate the industry. What happens, then, is that you send noughts and ones to the printing press and make your plate that way. Then you run the whole thing like an ordinary offset press, except that you can make changes for every turn of the cylinder. Here you have a hybrid capable of producing *one* unique copy at a time. Where previously you had to print, say, a thousand copies to turn a profit, here you're getting down to print runs of five hundred, perhaps less. With a colour quality very close to that of ordinary offset.

GLIMPSES OF THE FUTURE

BELLANDER: The trend is towards progressively shorter print runs, and Print on Demand can be a step in that direction. In a more long-term perspective I think there will be a printer in every home, or at any rate on a very local level. So that, if you are just interested in transformers, you will no longer go out and buy a thick book about electricity. Instead you will order texts about transformers on the Internet, put your own book together, download it and print it. With fiction things may possibly be different. There may come to be electronic books in the form of roll-up screens, of the thinness of fairly coarse paper and battery-powered. Then you simply download the book you want.

MOSSBERG: And the book trade?

BELLANDER: Like the publishers, it may acquire new functions and, for example, specialise in different genres. Be a sort of quality guarantee

by making the selection. Administer payments and the copyright aspect.

MOSSBERG: Is there anything about such a specialised and technically sophisticated future that worries you?

BELLANDER: Archiving possibilities in that case. What will we leave behind us? Good print on good paper will last for at least a few hundred years. A diskette perhaps for twenty.

MOSSBERG: But you clearly believe that practically everyone – within a reasonably foreseeable future – will be using diskettes and computers, progressively better and cheaper printers and a stronger, more advanced Internet?

BELLANDER: Not necessarily everybody. A critical number will suffice. Normally you don't need to cover the whole population in order to switch over to a new system. Because, sooner or later, you come to a point where it no longer pays to use old technology. And then the people who haven't kept up either have to incorporate themselves in what is new or stay outside. And remember, what I've been talking about isn't all that visionary. It's already within the bounds of possibility.

(22nd September 1997)

Are we still to have a Swedish detail book trade?

With authors getting less royalties on books sold through book clubs than on those sold in bookshops... with new, undercutting Internet bookshops mushrooming everywhere and foreign booksellers able to deliver books without charging 25 per cent VAT ... with a big Swedish publishing company showing such a lack of interest in book retailing as to offer booksellers the same prices as the Internet consumer...with more than one out of every four Swedish municipalities having no general bookshop –and policy-makers in the municipalities that still have a bookshop putting such a low value on its service, competence and delivery capacity as to jeopardise its very existence by getting more and more niggardly about local purchasing...“Is it any wonder to find one or two people asking whether we are going to have a Swedish retail book trade worthy of the name?” cries Thomas Rönström, Managing Director of the Swedish Booksellers’ Association and involved in the Print on Demand project⁴³.

MOSSBERG: You mean you’re in a perpetual state of turbulence?

RÖNSTRÖM: Yes. To take another example of the things we are up against in the retail trade, the notion is being hawked around that we overcharge. That’s as unfair as it is ignorant. With the aid of facile, populist and utter absurd specimen calculations – assuming a cost price without VAT and ignoring the cost of premises and personnel – people claim that we have enormous mark-ups. When do you see the same questions being put to other lines of business? To the publishers? When did we last see similar calculations of their mark-ups on their printing costs? Never. But we have had to struggle *for decades* against this kind of demagoguery – something every dealer comes up against, because the same prejudices are spread to the general public. In the end you find yourself asking: are we to have a retail book trade? If so, how is it to be financed? Are we to have State-owned shops?

MOSSBERG: Do you mean to say that things were better before the market was de-regulated and fixed retail prices abolished?

RÖNSTRÖM: I wouldn’t say that. Until 1970 we had a colossally regulated state of affairs. The publishers owned the books and the book trade had the exclusive right of selling them. We had over 500 booksellers

43 See also the section “PODIUM – a joint project”.

divided into an A team and a B team. Today we have over 300 well-stocked general bookshops and about 70 big specialised ones. There are also a number of service bookshops with quite a mixed range and any number of other places where books can be bought. We have one of the world's most de-regulated book markets, the envy of many countries, and we have learned to live with free competition. But it ought to be competition on equal terms. And I certainly do think that 'the real book trade' has been exposed to unnecessarily fierce competition. The first thing to hit us was the publishers' book clubs, which grew from practically nil to a quarter of the market for general reading, aided partly by the discriminatory pricing that resulted from the authors accepting lower royalties on book club titles, something which, under the new legislation, we have complained about to the Competition Authority.

MOSSBERG: And what about retail prices? Did they go down?

RÖNSTRÖM: Books have always been considered pretty expensive, but we have acquired a big range of cheap pocket editions and – thanks to competitive pricing – a heavy curb on the prices of the books that sell easiest – of which there are anything from about twenty to a hundred or so in a year. For the great majority of titles, though, prices have kept up quite well with price movements generally.

MOSSBERG: Shouldn't they have been expected to drop? What with free competition and the savings on printing costs resulting from computerisation?

RÖNSTRÖM: Possibly. Taking the book market as a whole, you find a considerable amount of economic growth in the past few decades. Practically all that growth has accrued to the publishers. The retail book trade has just about stood its ground. There are more bookshops being put out of business than there are being started up, and the main victims are small communities. And another thing, it's pure nonsense to say that direct sales by the publishers through book clubs have gone to completely new reader categories. Those sales have helped to put bookshops out of business, they've been an alternative to people who are already in the habit of reading and their recruitment of other reader groups has been highly marginal.

MOSSBERG: How do you feel, then, about the future of book reading?

RÖNSTRÖM: Adult book reading has grown, and it's encouraging that – thanks partly to community efforts for the promotion of reading – we've acquired a number of generations that are keen readers. On the other hand, the report of the Book Commission shows that children and young adults are reading less nowadays. If library and school funding continue to diminish, there will be cause for concern.

MOSSBERG: Concern for the future of the book?

RÖNSTRÖM: No, I am convinced that the written word, published in book form, has a long future ahead of it. The many threats to the book inferred from technical progress have never materialised. New technology is nothing to be afraid of, it's there to be used. One thing that has escalated in recent years is information *about* books. Computerisation has brought a veritable explosion, and in the trade we acquired the first generation of catalogue computers about five years ago. That generation is now being succeeded by the next, which offers less vulnerable access to information because it isn't dependent on being permanently on line to Seelig⁴⁴. Booksellers get a CD-ROM disk, CDBOK, which they download on to their hard disks and which is updated every night. At present CDBOK lists nearly a million available titles – not only Swedish ones but a large number of British and American books, the database of the Norwegian book trade and, before long, the Danish and Finnish ones too. In addition, every bookshop which is on the Internet has free access to bibliographic information about everything published in Swedish over the past hundred years or more, through Libris, a fantastic database run by the Royal Library.

MOSSBERG: At the same time as the booksellers – the big ones, at any rate – can offer all these virtual titles, in reality I have to plough through pile after pile of best-sellers before I get to the shelves with other books. And when I do, more and more often I can't find the book I'm looking for. So even though I'm wallowing in books, I have no chance of browsing through a book I'm not quite sure about.

RÖNSTRÖM: With today's output, instead of being able to show – physically – all new titles, as we used to, we have to keep to a limited range and make the rest available as best we can. Booksellers are good at that. The media are dazzled by all these unprofessional Internet bookshops that are mushrooming everywhere, offering millions of titles at knock-down prices. But can they deliver? They're offering titles that don't physically exist.

MOSSBERG: In a way, of course, that's what you intend doing. Offer books that don't yet exist in reality. Through Print on Demand.

RÖNSTRÖM: Yes, but we'll be able to deliver. Print on Demand will make an interesting adjunct to the service which booksellers are providing already. There are any number of titles which are out of print at the publishers and which our customers have to queue up for at the libraries, if indeed the libraries have them.

MOSSBERG: How would this work in practical terms?

44 AB Seelig & Co., the information, wholesale and distribution enterprise of the Swedish book trade.

RÖNSTRÖM: It's a bit too early to say. There are lots of questions to be settled. But looking at the actual project work, first of all we have to get a product range. As regards the retail book trade, booksellers wanting to take part will have to be computerised and on the Internet. It still matters to the book buyers, us being there in a purely physical sense and not just being a flicker on the screen for the limited percentage of the Swedish people who have the time and opportunity to use the Internet.

MOSSBERG: What do you think Print on Demand could mean for the book trade a little further ahead?

RÖNSTRÖM: We don't have any unrealistic expectations. Obviously, printing individual titles on demand doesn't have the potential of big business, in a purely economic sense. The values involved are quite different. The interesting thing is being able to offer our customers books which would otherwise not be available. The whole thing becomes twice as interesting when for once the book trade, which I now represent, can be a part of the whole development process.

(8th September 1997)

MOSSBERG: Looking back on the past year, how has the PoD project, now code-named PODIUM, progressed?

RÖNSTRÖM: What has happened since we met last autumn is that many PoD projects have been started. I would be very surprised, for instance, if the majority of publishing companies aren't wondering how to make use of the technique for printing small editions of uncertain titles.

MOSSBERG: But you have other premises?

RÖNSTRÖM: We aren't going to apply the term Print on Demand to anything except books printed on request – that is, books produced only when somebody asks for them. Work has now entered an intensive phase, and the first thing we have to do is build up a product range. That will be pretty limited to begin with and will have to grow successively as needs become visible. We aren't working by genres, we are discussing a number of segments. I can't say too much about it, but there are one or two things you can work out for yourself. Backlist books are one natural segment. Bookshops and libraries can help us to trace titles that are in demand now and again but can't be purchased from the publishers. Once that has been done, a certain amount of work remains to be done on each individual title. Rights questions have to be settled and digital originals produced. Another segment is immigrant literature, which addresses nationals who have great difficulty in getting their literature published and in getting hold of literature in their first language. To give you a few more examples of the segments we are discussing, there is new literature in Swedish which can have difficulty in finding its way on to the market. For example, there is Swedish fiction published in Finland – several very

well-known authors are no longer being part-published here in Sweden.

MOSSBERG: Does that mean co-operating with the Finnish publishing companies?

RÖNSTRÖM: Yes, if there is a publisher with a title which we think has the right marketability for our project, then of course we will be amenable to it. We'll be able to co-operate with many different publishers.

MOSSBERG: Swedish ones too?

RÖNSTRÖM: Of course. Pricing is another big question we're wrestling with. These are books which will be sold on demand in bookshops, but also on the Internet. The intention is for the customer to pay the same price whatever the mode of distribution. That in itself makes it hard to arrive at a price picture. And then there is a pain threshold for the price of a Print on Demand book, considering its fairly rudimentary get-up. PODIUM does have publishing competence, but if we were to think of ourselves as a publishing house with the usual overheads and mark-ups, it would never work. No, we have to see these things as separate worlds. PODIUM isn't a publishing house, it's a unique Print on Demand phenomenon working to completely new norms. We're all agreed on that.

MOSSBERG: When do you expect something to happen in the bookshops?

RÖNSTRÖM: I'm hoping we can have a few bookshops up and running during the early summer and, looking a bit further ahead, I'm counting on everybody who is computerised joining in. First, though, we must get some good pages on the Internet, showing our list of titles – perhaps about 25 to begin with – and there are a number of technical problems which will have to be solved, for example concerning ordering functions and transport. In-store marketing is also important: stickers, an Internet corner and inspection copies. The information we've put out so far suggests that booksellers are enthusiastic about the basic idea of making books which are wanted but out of print more available. They also appreciate all the different interests in the book market being involved in PODIUM.

MOSSBERG: Yes, and not only professional interests. The readers are also actively involved, because it's their wants that trigger the process.

RÖNSTRÖM: Customer orientation is always important. But the most unique thing in my opinion is that the whole chain of market players – from proprietors and writers to printers, forwarding agents and booksellers – have to be so frank with each other and so ready to negotiate and give and take – on the subject of prices, for example. This is tremendously exciting and has never happened before in our lines of business. And we are receiving indications that this model has aroused a great deal of interest in the outside world.

(29th January 1998)

A wonderful prospect

Wettergren's Bokhandel, with a total of seven general bookshops (five in Göteborg and two elsewhere in the west of Sweden) and a web bookshop of its own, is one of Sweden's oldest and best-established family concerns in the business, a firm that does not feel all that threatened and does not consider itself to have changed very dramatically over the years. "Competition from the book clubs certainly lies heavy on all of us," says fourth-generation bookseller Carl Wettergren, and he recalls that among other things this resulted, perhaps, in a certain over-emphasis of the giftware side. That is a thing of the past. But although the firm is and always has been extremely energetic in offering customers a full range, it still happens far too often that customers leave Wettergren's empty-handed, because the book they are looking for is no longer obtainable.

MOSSBERG: With your size, your locations and a reputation going back more than a hundred years, you don't have to fight tooth and nail for survival?

WETTERGREN: You could say so. But one has to realise that the growth potential for books is greatly inferior to that of office supplies and stationery. The hand of the book clubs lies heavy upon us. And it's certainly irritating, not to say unhealthy, when publishing houses recruit members just after Christmas by offering people, for less than SEK 10, the very books which, a few weeks earlier, we have had to sell for SEK 200 or 300 each.

MOSSBERG: You've opened an Internet bookstore yourselves.

WETTERGREN: Yes, and it's already returning a profit. I anticipate that we'll be selling on the Internet to corporate customers, mostly office supplies – easily selected, standardised products. But ordinary book buyers...I can't really see most of them sitting at home and clicking their computers. Though the Internet trade is certainly going to take a few per cent of book sales. And of course we must be in there, getting as big a share as we can, but I still think it's going to be marginal, at least where fiction is concerned. On the other hand, the Internet can turn out to be important on the teaching materials side, a field which, nowadays, we have very little indeed to do with. We are a local enterprise that will never get rich on educational literature or on sending books to Japan and Lapland. What we are wondering about, though, is setting up a cultural network in Göteborg, so that our Internet visitors would find links in various directions – to libraries, theatres or museums.

MOSSBERG: And what about prices? Are they lower in your web store?

WETTERGREN: Not really, even though they may look like it. Members of our Internet bookstore get a twenty per cent discount on the shop price by means of what we call a “twenty card”. Our store customers are offered the same card for SEK 80. The pay back is very fast. So that’s how we’ve solved the problem for the moment.

MOSSBERG: More than a hundred books about cooking and food were published last autumn. Isn’t that an example of a range which can easily be offered on the Internet but can’t be fully displayed in the shops?

WETTERGREN: If the books are new publications the odds are we’ve got them in the shop. But of course it’s all rather absurd. And next season...perhaps then all the publishers will be coming out with love-yourself books. If, on the other hand, you’re looking for books about boats, there’s hardly anything at the moment. We’re living in an age of trends, and over and above the hard sell, the bookshop’s range depends on the individual bookseller’s level of aspiration. If you want to go in for bestsellerism, that’s fine. Personally I find it both boring and pointless, running a bookshop without a wide selection. We aim to have the books on our shelves, and we spend a good deal of time deciding our range. Our staff are very responsive to customers’ wishes. Books from the big publishing houses are no problem. You can have more trouble with certain small publishers who haven’t entered themselves in the Seelig database.

MOSSBERG: You’re computerised, of course, how do you feel about that?

WETTERGREN: We’re no longer dependent on looking things up in stock lists which are already out of date before we get them. We now have up-to-the-minute information, though as yet only at title level. We would like to have more – for example details of what this or that author has written before. And why not reviews?

MOSSBERG: How do you feel about the future of the book?

WETTERGREN: I don’t think, for example, that we’re going to see any new edition of the Swedish National Encyclopaedia. At any rate, not without State subsidies. It’ll be too expensive. But as regards non-fiction and handbooks for the common man, as well as fiction...I think books are here to stay. I see no alternative to the paper book, no innovation that would make people start consuming books in a new way.

MOSSBERG: There is talk of paper-thin, roll-up computers where you can download – easily, if not free of charge – one novel after another.

WETTERGREN: Yes, a lot of things are already possible today and technology is moving very fast, but in the present situation I have more faith in Print on Demand.

MOSSBERG: Will you be taking part in the project that’s planned?

WETTERGREN: We think it's fascinating. The most important thing for the book trade, of course, is being able to offer a diversity of good books. It's alarming to see our big publishing companies – which, incidentally, I think are getting more and more cowardly in their publishing policy – amalgamating. On the other hand, the small publishing firms are getting more and more important. But take our classics. A country like ours not having classics publishing worthy of the name is pathetic to say the least of it. Embarrassing. Print on Demand could turn out to be the solution. Being able to retrieve from a database the classic which someone – perhaps a person wanting to make a special study of one author – is looking for...or a slightly more recent book which is out of print...and perhaps even printing it here in the shop. It's a wonderful prospect! We get so very many inquiries. But as yet I've no idea about the more detailed workings of it all – rights, databases and hardware.

MOSSBERG: And in business terms?

WETTERGREN: Something like eighty or eight-five per cent of our customers can make their own way to the cash till. The others need help. Even today, ordering gives us a lot of work to do. Every title means many different operations, and obviously it's hard to rake in a profit on that kind of transaction.

MOSSBERG: Especially if you find that the book's unobtainable.

WETTERGREN: Quite. But next time perhaps that particular customer belongs to the majority who can manage on their own. I expect the same thing will happen with Print on Demand: it may prove difficult to make much of a profit on each individual transaction. And yet the whole thing still seems very attractive indeed. It's a new idea which gives us in the trade a chance of getting better at what we are doing.

(9th February 1998)

Everything else is a half-measure

The Böcker och Blad bookshop is on the outer fringe of the shopping centre in Henån, a community of four thousand. The shop windows are small but well-filled and customers enter by way of a stairwell where a showcase charged with pocket books gives a hint of what is in store. On the left is the bookshop, on the right the bank. Straight in front is a staircase leading to the summertime piles of sale books. Well over a third of the annual turnover comes from those weeks of the year when Orust is inundated with yachtsmen and summer visitors. Also upstairs are the offices of the other businesses run by the two proprietors, Gunnel and Reinhold Hedenblad: his family business, her consulting firm and the office of the Ugglan bookstore chain, which has local booksellers nationwide. They call themselves entrepreneurs, they run their bookshop “because it’s such fun”, they recently opened yet another bookshop in a shopping centre outside the town of Uddevalla, and they are very interested in PoD developments.

MOSSBERG: You run what is called a service bookshop. What does that mean?

R. HEDENBLAD: Putting it simply, it’s a small bookshop entitled to State product range support⁴⁵. We are compensated to some extent for the benefits which larger bookshops can bargain for with the publishers. To qualify for the support, you undertake to purchase a certain number of newly published books.

MOSSBERG: Could you have started the shop without other sources of income?

R. HEDENBLAD: Hardly. People said I was mad, starting a bookshop in Henån. Ours is rather a special kind of reality. Selling books which can cost several hundred crowns, but which people can just as well borrow free of charge on the other side of the square. We have getting on for three thousand different books, many of them in just one copy, and all sorts of customers. Children. Seniors. Students and companies. From the municipality, only the library usually buys anything from us. Companies like to have a long-term relationship with their suppliers, but municipalities work differently. They are under such pressure that

45 From the report of the Book Commission, SOU 1997:141: “The purpose of the support is to help the service bookshop to stock what in relation to its size is a good selection of good literature for which there is a demand. ...Questionnaire surveys by BFI [the Financial Institute of the Book Trade] have shown this support to be a precondition for the survival of many bookshops.”

- they don't stop to consider long-term effects. Because if, by always accepting the tender for required reading and office supplies that seems cheapest at first sight, the municipalities succeed in knocking out all local enterprise, then the odds are that, after a while, they will find themselves with a big bill to pay. Competition has to be *cultivated*.
- MOSSBERG: You have to work pretty hard?
- G. HEDENBLAD: It's not so bad. We don't work in the shop ourselves, but I've certainly done a lot of unpaid work over the past seventeen years.
- MOSSBERG: Do you get a lot of orders?
- G. HEDENBLAD: Quite a few.
- MOSSBERG: Do you order by computer?
- R. HEDENBLAD: Yes, we have a catalogue computer, but we don't subscribe to CDBOK.
- MOSSBERG: Do you often get people asking for a book which is out of print?
- G. HEDENBLAD: It happens.
- R. HEDENBLAD: Quite often.
- MOSSBERG: So you are interested in Print on Demand developments?
- R. HEDENBLAD: I believe in Print on Demand for local retail outlets. But from what I've heard⁴⁶ the idea is that we would order books on the Internet and then produce them with the aid of a printing works. My vision is different. Because if you can have the finished book in your hand in a quarter of an hour, it would be absurd and inefficient to say the least of it, having to drive off somewhere – many miles in our case – to collect it! No, Print on Demand can never be economically interesting as far as we are concerned if it has to go by way of a printer. My vision is being able, perhaps in a few years' time, when you can buy some sort of advance laser printer at an affordable price – to offer that service in the same way as we already offer fax transmission and copying. So the customer comes in and asks after a title we don't have in stock. We then visit a database to check if the book is available by Print on Demand. And then we call it up, for example by its ISBN number. Then perhaps we ask what size the customer wants the text to be, we show type specimens, we talk about how many pages the book will run to with this or that type size and what it will cost in this or that version. I imagine people will also be able to choose between different types of binding.
- MOSSBERG: Your vision seems to be that of a parallel form of publishing. Publishing houses offering right from the start to deliver *either* on paper *or* digitally. Does that apply to new editions as well?

46 See also the section "PODIUM – a joint project".

- R. HEDENBLAD: Why not. Where certain books are concerned.
- G. HEDENBLAD: Basic non-fiction. Different types of educational literature. Rather out-of-the-way novels.
- R. HEDENBLAD: Foreign literature...I mean, really, is there any sense in sending a book from the USA to Sweden? Or take collections of poetry. Instead of publishing a few hundred copies of a title, the publishers could issue more and supply them digitally when, and only when, they are called for. Apart from poetry books, which are often pretty thin, these books aren't going to be cheap. I realise that. Compare it with what we charge for copying: SEK 1 per page. So a novel will come pretty expensive, allowing for hardware and working time, about the same price as a newly published book. But actually I believe our customers are willing to pay for getting the very book they want and getting it right away.
- MOSSBERG: There's something in that. We're talking about books that the customers are really looking for. But you two are the first people I've met who seem convinced that this may turn out to be good business!
- R. HEDENBLAD: Perhaps because, as distributors, we don't have any wild profit margins and expectations. Yes, we think it can turn out to be interesting and businesslike, so long as they come up with cheaper machinery and so long as we do the thing ourselves.
- G. HEDENBLAD: Everything else is a half-measure.

(18th February 1998)

Better availability – better business all round

If technical progress creates new opportunities, they have to be used as much as possible, partly for doing good business but also to make books more available, in the opinion of Sören Wahlund, former Marketing Manager of Seelig and Managing Director of the Bokia chain of bookstores, and for not quite a year now Managing Director of Akademibokhandeln Butiks AB, which has upwards of twenty general bookshops and about ten campus bookstores⁴⁷. “And experience shows,” he adds, “that interest, and sales with it, increase with availability. So it isn’t a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul. And I think that holds good both for the Internet book trade and for Print on Demand.”

MOSSBERG: Volumetrically, you’re the biggest bookstore concern in Sweden.

WAHLUND: Yes, we have several of Sweden’s most widely stocked bookstores, with Citybutiken here in Stockholm as our flag ship. There we have over a hundred thousand titles physically in stock. And some of our most traditional shops – the former Lundeqvistska in Uppsala and Gumperts in Göteborg – with tens of thousands of titles on their shelves are outstandingly well-stocked for a small language area like ours.

MOSSBERG: Then you’re big enough to buy and sell books by the pallet. How do you view that development in relation to literature which targets a smaller readership?

WAHLUND: I don’t see any conflict. The reason for having big editions of books is that there’s a big demand for them. There’s nothing wrong with seeing that the demand is provided for. So when I read in the papers about how wretched everything is, how publishing is being watered down and bookshops are thinning out, I think it’s more myth than reality. There’s another perspective you can add: never before have so many books been sold! We’re in the middle of an expansion. Incredible mega-bookstores are emerging in the USA. Hundreds of bookshops in new locations, in gigantic shopping centres and in other places where you get people moving about. Books everywhere! Bookshops with a range of titles that quite often equal our Citybutik’s, which itself is the biggest bookstore in Scandinavia.

MOSSBERG: Now you’re talking about the USA. Not quite the same thing as a small town in Sweden.

WAHLUND: True, but it still points to a fantastic development for a traditional product which has been pronounced dead over and over again. When films came in. When radio broadcasting came in. When

47 –bookstores, often on university campuses, specialising in required reading.

television came in. When video came in. When the Internet came in. And so on. And yet book-reading has done nothing but grow.

MOSSBERG: And what do you say about the current trend sensitivity, with something like two hundred food books coming out in a year, at the same time as you can hardly get hold of anything at all about leisure craft or fruit trees, for instance?

WAHLUND: This is a living trade with fluctuations. You have to be alive to everything which can conceivably become supremely interesting for a year or so ahead. But of course there can be anomalies, with everyone diving into the same thing. So much the better then if a new technique can enable us to fill the gaps, so that the seventeen people who want a book on a particular subject have a chance of getting it.

MOSSBERG: Now you're talking about Print on Demand.

WAHLUND: Yes, viewing the whole thing from the other end, obviously it's all to the good if a new technique makes it possible to obtain books which otherwise would be unobtainable. But it's pretty hard to tell how large a part of the product range will be affected, because we don't know how fast things are moving, how quickly costs can be reduced or how many people are interested in exploiting this new opportunity. At present I think most people assume that for a number of years it's going to cost more than it's worth and that Print on Demand won't be interesting for what we define as 'commercial books', where industrial production leads to prices which the very small editions can never compete with, even if costs are spiralling downwards. All the same, I am pretty well convinced that this business of storing books digitally and pushing the button and getting them exactly when you want them has a future.

MOSSBERG: With your supply of required reading and that sort of thing in mind?

WAHLUND: Most of our campus stores offer various compendium services already, but something a bit simpler than what you call Print on Demand. In that field of application, Print on Demand is pretty certain to develop and grow. Then we have the other field, namely previously published books which the publishing houses don't want to stock any more. And there again I think Print on Demand can become a reality within the foreseeable future, and also for certain kinds of books that are hard to come by and which, right from the outset, are too expensive to produce in short print runs. In the long run perhaps we can have in-store production facilities. Perhaps the customers are ready to pay extra, especially for professional use, because then the cost is often not such a critical consideration.

MOSSBERG: One can also be a little bit visionary and – like a bookseller I interviewed earlier – ask why an Internet bookstore in the USA has to

send an ordered book right across the world if the purchaser could get it immediately by calling on you, you contacting the publisher and the publisher digitally transmitting the original over the telephone line, so that in a few minutes you can hand over a finished book.

WAHLUND: That's complicated, because it has consequences on several levels. The whole structure of publishing will be affected – for example, the size of the basic edition. But if you ask me whether, in a bookseller perspective, I would like to be able to choose between ordering a book in physical form or on-line – in a situation where the customer is standing in front of me and I don't happen to have the book in stock – then of course I would welcome the option. Being able to offer my customers the chance of choosing between waiting a few days or, for extra payment, getting the book right away. But the question isn't that simple in a trade perspective, though it does illustrate the importance of keeping the closest possible watch on developments. And of course, as soon as things begin to happen, we want to be in there.

MOSSBERG: You've started an Internet bookstore of your own, even though everyone seems to agree that web bookstores are loss-makers?

WAHLUND: That's true. Take for example the leading Internet bookstore, Amazon, which has been going for three years in the USA, offers more than a million titles and has been enormously successful as regards the volume of books sold, but is still making heavy losses. At the same time, the whole of this development is tremendously exciting: the technique in itself means a streamlining of mail order activities. Because what we're really talking about is nothing more than a kind of sophisticated mail order. To us in Akademibokhandeln, the Internet book trade is above all an adjunct to our main operation. It gives us a chance of making ourselves seen in the market, presenting our stock and our shops, and it's a natural part of our marketing. We improve the availability of stock and we sell a certain amount of books to the people who want them. Besides, you can safely assume that it will be easier for us, with a viable main operation, to make ends meet than it is for someone having to build up the whole thing from scratch⁴⁸.

48 Since this interview took place, and in addition to Akademibokhandeln's own Internet bookstore, the company's owner, KF Media, has acquired 45 per cent of Sweden's biggest virtual Internet bookstore, Bokus. (Virtual bookstore: a bookselling company with no physical stocks but with access to large databases and – over the Internet – fast ordering and distribution routines.)

MOSSBERG: At the same time you're making a selection available in places which don't have a well-stocked bookshop.

WAHLUND: Yes, but if you look at the purchasers, most of them live in big cities or city suburbs, not in the country.

MOSSBERG: And what about prices? Do you compete with yourselves?

WAHLUND: So far we haven't had that kind of aggressive pricing.

MOSSBERG: Looking further ahead, don't you think all the same that the purely virtual bookstore will be a serious threat to the traditional variety?

WAHLUND: There is a limit to what even the best of new technology is capable of taking over. Where that limit goes will depend among other things on the big advantages of a physical store. As a customer you can come in, size things up and talk to qualified staff, who can get out good alternatives and give the advice which you and nobody else may need. You can hold the book, leaf through it, buy it, go home and read it. Immediately. There's still a world of difference between buying books that way and keying things into a computer. And experience shows that interest, and sales with it, increase with availability. So it isn't a matter of robbing Peter to pay Paul. And I think that holds good both for the Internet book trade and for Print on Demand. So if technical progress creates new opportunities, they have to be used as much as possible.

(6th March 1998)

An oasis of calm

You feel as if transported to another, more spacious age – or to a long-established bookshop in some other country – as you tip-toe between the tall shelves of dark, shiny wood, navigating by the hand-written category labels on the shelf-ends. Books, books and more books. The two owners have lost count of how many titles are on view here or can be fetched up from the store in the basement. They opened Partille Bokhandel, outside Göteborg, at a time when many others were being forced out of business and in a location which had the doomsters prophesying disaster. Former fellow-teachers Margareta von Geijer and Gunilla Ericsson administer and distribute both new Swedish publications and an impressive amount of foreign literature and backlist titles with no more computer support than was already available thirteen years ago.

MOSSBERG: You have an enormous selection!

VON GEIJER: When we started, a general bookshop had to have at least four thousand titles. We had a smaller place then. When we moved in here we brought six or seven thousand books with us, I should think. This place is more than three times as big.

MOSSBERG: Do you often get people asking for books which are unobtainable?

VON GEIJER: No. One or two classics, perhaps. But otherwise? No, not usually. And the fact is, not all books *can* be available. The problem if anything is that too many are published. I don't feel at all as if we needed more.

MOSSBERG: Fixing a meeting with you was quite difficult and we don't have much time. You have to work hard?

VON GEIJER: We work a lot. Customers just come pouring in, and we have long opening hours, from nine to six. After that there's a lot still to be done, everything from vacuum cleaning to ordering the books we've sold during the day. You have to be on the go all the time, keeping stocks up to date. And then we have our literary Saturdays, with readings and meetings with authors. We usually squeeze in at least sixty or seventy guests and sometimes more than a hundred.

MOSSBERG: And new technology? Do you use a catalogue computer? CDBOK? The Internet?

VON GEIJER: We don't have anything like that. We don't think we need it. We've got our catalogues. They come regularly and work very well. And for our daily stocktaking we use a micronic⁴⁹. Nothing could be simpler.

MOSSBERG: And Print on Demand? Have you formed an opinion?

VON GEIJER: Not really. We did have a collection of poems by Lars Forssell⁵⁰ printed at the customer's request. It came through after a few days, so it worked excellently.

MOSSBERG: You ordered over the Internet?

VON GEIJER: I don't quite know what we did. But things would have been easier if it had been issued by a publisher. Frankly, I don't think Print on Demand would do our bookshop any good in the everyday run of things. But of course that may change as time goes on.

(11th March 1998)

49 Books delivered from Seelig contain what is called an SRO card (SRO: Seelig Re-order System). The bookseller is equipped with a light pen which belongs together with a modem. This in turn can be connected to Seeligs over the telecommunications network. With this equipment, the bookseller usually goes through the day's crop of SRO cards, decides which titles to re-order, calls Seeligs, moves the light pen over the bar code on the SRO card, and the order is placed. It is processed next day and the books are usually delivered straight to the shop the following morning.

50 See the section "Print on Demand as a real life poem".

Podium – a joint project

The PODIUM Print on Demand project is a direct consequence of the co-operation between the number of authors and the Arkitektkopia company which led to the widely noted press conference in January 1997⁵¹. The project began in the spring of 1997 as a working group. Its principal, Författarcentrum Öst, applied for and in September that year obtained a grant from the State bursary fund Framtidens Kultur “for the inauguration of a three-year project aimed at developing new procedures for publishing and distributing literature”. A project leader was hired in January 1998 and the more concrete activities then began under the code name PODIUM. The project introduced itself on the Internet in January 1998⁵², when it issued the following declaration of intent: “Through wide-ranging cultural co-operation, to broaden the supply of Swedish and foreign quality literature.”

PARTNERS

The following are represented in the project group described: Författarcentrum Öst, the Stockholm City Library, the Swedish Booksellers’ Association, Tidskriftsverkstaden i Stockholm, Författares Bokmaskin, Arkitektkopia Colorcenter AB and the publishing house En bok för alla⁵³. The original working group also included representatives of the National Council for Cultural Affairs and the Royal Library, both of which now have observer status.

PODIUM’S BOOKS

The basic idea of PODIUM is, using comparatively new technology (Non Impact Printing and the Internet), to make available books which, for one

51 See, for example, the section “Print on Demand means freer expression”.

52 Website: <http://www.swepod.com>

53 *Författarcentrum* (comprising a national organisation and four local ones) is a set of non-profit associations tasked with broadening the interface between authors and the general public and with disseminating literature in the community. *Författares Bokmaskin* is a non-commercial unit for the production of books of a “literary and innovative character” and is open to everyone willing to devote work, money and time to it. *Tidskriftsverkstäderna*, i.e. “Magazine Workshops” exist in six Swedish towns and provide technical know-how and equipment, partly for digital origination. (Source: Kulturkatalogen 1997, the National Council for Cultural Affairs)

reason or another, are not obtainable in bookshops, except possibly second-hand. Given the limited resources available, the exploration necessary in order to arrive at a suitable selection of titles, the work involved in acquiring rights and concluding agreements of different kinds, the digitalisation of manuscripts, the presentation of the books and so on, building up a digital stock of PODIUM books will take time. To start with, information has been canvassed, through the inquiries and waiting lists of bookshops and libraries, about titles which are frequently in demand but are difficult or impossible to get hold of. In addition, all customers coming into contact with PODIUM –through bookshops, libraries and the Internet –will be encouraged to state their wants. PODIUM’s range, at all events at this early stage of things, can be said to fall into two different sectors and a number of segments.

PODIUM’S OWN LIST:

The project will operate on similar lines to a publishing business (or in collaboration with existing publishers) with regard to previously published titles, i.e. *backlist books*, *Swedish classics included*. This segment is intended to include all kinds of general literature, i.e. fiction, books for children and young persons and non-fiction published previously but no longer available. Another important segment consists of *literature in languages other than Swedish*. In this connection, *newly written literature* by Swedish citizens writing in their original language, or by foreign authors living in Sweden, may come to be made available, as well as literature in original languages from other countries. A third segment already distinguishable is *Finland-Swedish literature*; many Finland-Swedish writers who are also well-known in Sweden are no longer being published here. In these cases, and in collaboration with the Finland-Swedish publishers, either Non Impact Printing or purveyance of traditionally produced books may come into question.

PODIUM’S FREE SECTOR:

In this sector, first-time and other writers wishing to publish *new books* –and at the same time to act as *their own publishers* –are invited to store their finished manuscripts in PODIUM’s database, to introduce themselves and their works on PODIUM’s home pages on the Internet and to take advantage of the system of production, distribution and sales which PODIUM successively builds up. PODIUM does not intend carrying out any type of screening where this “free sector” is concerned. The group are prepared for problems to occur in this connection but will cross that bridge if and when they come to it.

BUYING PODIUM'S BOOKS

At the present stage of planning, PODIUM's gradually expanding stock of books will be available for purchase in the following ways. Alternative A: Through *booksellers* affiliated to PODIUM, who will market the concept in their shops, provide inspection copies and have access to the Internet, where information about PODIUM's titles will be available, as well as prices and straightforward ordering routines (eventually too, information about the author's other output, excerpts from reviews and so on). The customer will be able to choose between collecting the book in the shop or getting it sent home by post. Alternative B: Through the *libraries* wishing to provide this kind of service. The customer will be able to choose between receiving the book C.O.D. a few days later or collecting it from a PODIUM-affiliated bookshop. Alternative C: Over *the Internet*, where the same ordering and payment routines will apply as in libraries.

PRICES AND COST COVERAGE

As regards costs, the prices of PODIUM's books will be the same whatever the ordering method. All purchases will be channelled through a bookshop affiliated to the project. The bookshop will be invoiced by PODIUM, which in turn will cover other expenditure (mainly royalties to authors, printing costs and its own operations).

CO-OPERATION HOPED FOR BY PODIUM

PODIUM also expects to be able to establish itself as a qualified, Internet-borne information centre and intermediary for previously elusive or unobtainable quality literature and as an advisory body to authors and others. Among other things, the intention is to set up a network of competent associates to whom authors can be referred when they need advice and help, for example, in matters of design and origination. It is also intended to convey information about available literature (traditionally produced included) in the Nordic languages. The possibilities are being explored of close co-operation with the Drama Direkt project which is being operated by the Swedish Union of Playwrights and which will make available a considerable proportion of Swedish drama, partly in the form of single-printed scripts or pocket books⁵⁴, as well as the possibilities of co-operating with the Runeberg Project at the University of Linköping⁵⁵, in which a large number of Swedish classics are being digitalised and placed

54 Website: <http://www.dramadirekt.com>

55 Website: <http://www.liu.se>

on the Internet. Efforts are also being made to develop suitable forms of co-operation with Swedish and foreign publishers. Co-operation – mainly in the form of a network for the interchange of experience and know-how – has also been inaugurated with a number of authors' organisations, mainly European, which have shown a great deal of active interest in the project.

SOMETHING OF THE PRESENT SITUATION (MARCH 1998) AND
THE FUTURE

Hedengrens Bokhandel in Stockholm is initially acting as a pilot store for the PODIUM project. During the early summer of 1998 it is expected that the experiment will be broadened so as to include a larger number of bookshops in West and Central Sweden and in Norrbotten in the far north. The aim is for PODIUM, before the project period expires, to have established co-operation with interested booksellers and libraries all over Sweden and for the project by that time to be capable of turning into a self-financing, non-profit operation.

(15th March 1998)

By return of post

New players are entering the scene while this report is being written. The most interesting of them in this context is information consultant Mart Marend. With a professional background which includes editing text books, he already began ten years ago to discuss the feasibility of book production by Non Impact Printing with representatives of the then newly started Nykopia company in Stockholm. By the summer of 1997 he judged the technology to be sufficiently developed and the market perhaps ripe for Books on Demand. And so, in the autumn of 1997, on the island of Gotland – which he had made his home a few years earlier – he started an Internet-borne operation offering “printing, distribution and a marketplace” and every conceivable peripheral service “such as copy editing, design and marketing,” to authors wishing to publish their own books and to publishers wishing to produce small editions of backlisted titles⁵⁶.

THE INTERMEDIARY

Marend’s firm, then, serves as a link between the existing manuscript – in whatever state – and the finished book. Authors who are able to deliver their pages fully edited on diskette or by e-mail can expect to receive the very first copy of their book⁵⁷ for examination the very next day, by return of post. Other authors and proprietors are offered “flexible solutions” with a variety of “quasi-publishing services” and production estimates.

UNDER STARTER’S ORDERS

The business⁵⁸ is still in its infancy and no really targeted marketing has yet started. The important thing, as Mart Marend sees it, is getting the *entire* flow to work, as regards both production itself and getting the books across. As an example of what has happened so far, though, mention can be made of the ten or more books which have been produced or are under way –

56 Marend also caters for other writers – researchers and journalists, for example – and for schools, companies, public authorities and other organisations in need, for example, of updatable reports, documentations or analyses at short notice. Further on this subject, see the next section.

57 –produced by Nykopia Tryck AB of Stockholm –

58 –its offers are presented in greater detail at the website <http://www.books-on-demand.com> –

ranging from reprints of backlisted literature to first-time publications of novels, a collection of poetry, a massive family history and a solid textbook of economics. Most of the originals have acquired some form of upgrading/processing. In addition, several of the books have been given a standardised wrapper, which has reduced the cost of the finished book. Marend also considers it likely that within the near future he will allow his clients – if they so desire – to choose between a number of ready-designed inlay templates.

EVERY BOOK MUST GENERATE EARNINGS

Marend's clients – the responsible publishers – pay an initial charge⁵⁹. To this are added the cost of any peripheral services and the agreed unit price of each book produced. The clients themselves decide the selling price. The prices offered over the Internet have hitherto varied between SEK 110 and 290, postage and VAT included. The buyers receive the book they have ordered by post, with an invoice payable to Marend's firm, which in turn pays the overheads and sends its clients a monthly balance statement. Marend insists that "every book going through my system has to generate earnings". Where the clients are concerned, the initial costs have mostly been covered after selling between forty and sixty copies, after which they start getting paid for their work.

THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE

The biggest and most interesting challenge, as Marend sees it, is not prices but questions of how books on demand are to reach their readers through the Internet, bookshops, libraries and tailor-made channels. "At the same time," he adds, "when preparing calculations you can't help wondering about the political madness of more than half the price of a book being different kinds of taxes."⁶⁰

(30th March 1998)

59 According to his Internet home page, updated on 1st January 1998, this can be as little as SEK 1,000.

60 Sweden, together with Denmark, has the highest book VAT in Europe.

V

Some reflections and conclusions

More and more insistently and vociferously and from an increasing number of quarters, we are being told that, in the media maelstrom of our age, there is a great need for publishing activities which guarantee their readers diversity and additional substance. Perception of this need forms the starting point of the study/report –ELECTRONIC PUBLISHING; Strategic Developments for the European Publishing Industry Towards the Year 2000 (EL-PUB2) –which was published in 1996 under the European Commission’s INFO 2000 programme. The preface remarks how important different forms of publishing activity have been for social and cultural development and change ever since the age of Gutenberg, and how, in our own time, the importance of these activities has dwindled⁶¹.

PSEUDO-EVENTS AND MANIPULATION OF OPINIONS

These observations are easy to agree with. Superficial and fragmentary, unsubstantiated and inflammatory, prejudice-breeding and sensational messages addressed to large, susceptible and rapidly changeable bodies of opinion have, time and time again in our present age and in our own continent –due mainly to conditions connected with control of the media –supplanted the more versatile and reflective communication of knowledge which can be guaranteed by the existence of a large number of free authors and journalists.

NOT A TRACE OF THE PAPER BOOK

The importance of building up a *strong content* publishing industry based on the historical publishing traditions of Europe⁶² is strongly emphasised in

61 “Electronic mass communications (and in particular television) became a much more effective channel than the printed word for reaching large numbers of people.”

62 “As we move towards the Information Society, the European Commission has stressed the importance of development of a strong content industry which builds on the historical tradition of publishing in Europe.”

the preface to the report. The Print on Demand concept⁶³ in all its smallness of scale accords with these ideas, but in the EU report – even though it focuses on publishing activity in the broad sense and employs a brief chronological perspective (1996–2000) – it is hard to find any trace of the existence and value of the traditional paper book or of Print on Demand as one of several possible ways of achieving the interest-oriented diversification and the transition to more personal reader service which the report foresees and advocates⁶⁴.

THE FUTURES PERSPECTIVE OF THE EU REPORT

On the other hand it is claimed, under the battle cry “from scribe to screen” and in a number of futures perspectives, that the promises of the information society will have been honoured by the year 2000⁶⁵, that it is governments which will be responsible for the availability and the content quality of this development, and that it is the publishers who will be responsible for the speed and diversity, that the consumers will be ready to pay for participation in the electronic output of publishers and booksellers⁶⁶ and that the transition from the “product-oriented” publishing of the printed word to the “service-oriented” publishing of the computer screen will, within a few years, also benefit the interests of shareholders by charges imposed on use, revenues from commission activities and, above all, advertising revenue⁶⁷.

EXISTING RESOURCES AND NEEDS

I will not dwell any further, however, on the good intentions or the many assumptions, visions of the future and recommendations put forward in the

63 For the sake of simplicity I will in future employ the term “Print on Demand concept” both for books printed one at a time on request (Books on Demand) and for those produced in short or very short runs by Non Impact Printing techniques.

64 This can be partly excused on the grounds that the report, although it aims to cover all types of publishing activity, has a certain bias in favour of newspaper and magazine publishing, focuses on multi media and on-line publishing and takes in a broad field which also includes the need for technical improvements, as well as requirements to be met by European and national authorities, e.g. as regards the construction of rules and infrastructures.

65 “By 2000, the promise of the Information Society will be fulfilled because users and government initiatives will increasingly focus their attention on high quality content.”

66 “Users will pay for Electronic Publishing if it offers improved content quality, efficiency of use, and personalised service.”

67 “The profitability of Electronic Publishing will be secured by taking advertising shares from TV.”

European Commission's report⁶⁸, because these have little to do with the PoD concept, a concept which – unlike the somewhat airier strategies presented in EL-PUB2 – has emerged from below and on the basis of existing techniques. Techniques which, by the standards of information technology, could not be termed new. Techniques which, where book production is concerned, would probably have remained in obscurity for a good while yet, if one or two inspired individuals had not done something about it.

ENTHUSIASTS AND MEDIA

So the development of the PoD concept which gathered speed at the beginning of 1997 was triggered, not by the technology itself but rather by author Peter Curman's action, prompted by his aim of using new technology to safeguard diversity, widen the influence of authors, critics and also readers on book publishing and make foreign literature available. Another essential factor was Curman's capacity, in partnership with the Arkitektkopia company, for using reality as an experimental arena in a way which attracted media interest⁶⁹.

AN ELEMENT OF SENSATION

The journalists⁷⁰ not only reported complete books being turned out in a matter of minutes⁷¹, they also latched on to statements which enabled them to put an element of sensationalism into their reporting by making Print on Demand look like a conflict between authors and publishers. It is impossible to say whether this slanting was a good or a bad thing. Probably, though, it was part of the reason why the PoD concept (according to information from one of those involved) received nearly an hour's nationwide broadcasting coverage and, in addition, figured daily in the papers for at least two months.

68 It can be ordered from the website <http://www.echo.lu/elpub2/en/home.html>

69 Concerning the press conference held on 20th January 1997, see the section headed "Print on Demand means freer expression".

70 –many of whom ought reasonably to have known already about the possibility of producing thick publications by Non Impact Printing –

71 One year later, Mart Marend (see previous section) states that the time needed for producing a book of about 200 pages, using what at present is the most advanced technique, is something like one and a half minutes.

SEEDS THAT HAVE BEEN SOWN

Probably the publicity is also part of the reason why today Print on Demand must be taken as an established concept in the Swedish book trade. Quite a few seeds have also been sown in the minds of authors and other interested parties at international level, not least in corners of the world where freedom of expression is under constraint and where the value of the new technology, with its cross-border qualities, cannot be overrated.

THE PRESENT SITUATION: 31ST MARCH 1998

At the very moment of writing these lines, two international conferences are taking place in Stockholm. "The Power of Culture" is attracting ministers of culture and other delegates from 130 countries, in an attempt, based on the UNESCO report "Our Creative Diversity", to agree on a global action plan for cultural policy. This too is expected to give a great deal of scope to the concept of diversity and to protecting the freedom of expression. At the same time, artistic and literary professionals from all corners of the world have gathered for the World Conference on Culture 1998, in order among other things to discuss the influence of the new technology on cultural development.

A CASE HISTORY

Yesterday, on the first day of the conferences, most of the lecturers at the conference of cultural workers had handed in manuscripts to the arrangers in Stockholm. At his computer in Fröjel, on the island of Gotland, Mart Marend⁷² compiled the first version of what at that stage was 164 pages of conference proceedings. In addition to the usual information (programme, presentation of speakers, list of participants etc.), it contains a draft appeal to the ministers at the parallel conference and the texts of addresses and lectures. The edited text was e-mailed at 18.12 to the printers in Stockholm, and *this morning* a copy was delivered to each of the delegates at the World Conference on Culture and, a little later, to the ministers at the parallel conference⁷³. *Tomorrow* work begins on a version which is intended to contain the final versions of the appeal and all the lectures. If everything goes according to plan⁷⁴ this neatly designed "conference pocket edition"

72 See also previous section.

73 It also landed in my letter box, in Göteborg, an hour or so ago.

74 – which it did –

(which by then will also be illustrated) will be distributed at the conclusion of the World Conference on Culture.

THE INTERACTION BETWEEN PHYSICAL AND DIGITAL REALITIES

Through this “case history”, knowledge of the Print on Demand concept and of some of its more spectacular merits⁷⁵ is distributed, hands on, to hundreds of cultural workers and politicians from different parts of the world. In addition, cultural workers from many continents are following the conference and are able, by e-mail, to take part in the discussions, which are being published on the Internet and updated at half-hourly intervals. Those who are unable to attend physically can, of course, also take the opportunity of keying in an order for the documentation⁷⁶ – why not under the battle cry of “from scribe to screen and back again”?

BY FAR THE MOST IMPORTANT THING

Where other interests are concerned, there is reason to assume that the knowledge of PoD which last year’s publicity, at best, led to has subsided. Even if information has already begun to be disseminated on the Internet, through bookshops and through libraries⁷⁷, the future of the concept and its acceptance by *the book-reading public* will stand or fall by the book trade succeeding, within a reasonable length of time, in its task of building up *a considerable digital store* of classics and backlisted books which are much in demand and can no longer be ordered from publishers, and of literature from other countries. Preferably too, newly published titles which people are talking about.

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Although a great deal has happened during the period I have tried to describe in this report, a number of questions remain, the most important of which, I think, are as follows.

- Can the openness and the hopes for co-operation characterising the intentions of the PODIUM project result in book-readers, within the

75 –fast production and re-editing opportunities –

76 –a third version, also including the concluding addresses and contributions to the electronic debate. This can be ordered from the website <http://www.books-on-demand.com>

77 See the sections “PODIUM – a joint project” and “By return of post”.

foreseeable future and in an uncomplicated manner⁷⁸ gaining access to information about practically *all* books that can be printed on demand?

- Given that *making books available* is the greatest merit of the POD concept and that good books are not perishable goods, will the book trade rally round to the PODIUM project and its external production and traditional delivery (by post), or will it choose to lie low pending machinery of its own and digital deliveries?
- What do the established publishing firms think of the PoD concept? Is the predominantly negative attitude on the part of Swedish publishers which I have presented in this report and which dates from the autumn of 1997 *typical today* and of the majority of publishers?
- Can *agreements*, acceptable to both sides, be reached between authors and publishers, for example when switching over to publishing on demand after an edition has sold out but with individual books still in demand, or in connection with digital storage and publishing on demand of part or all of the edition, in such a way that the edition agreed on is no longer based on the number of ready-printed copies?
- Will quality books produced in an edition of, say, 400 copies but only when asked for have the same chance of *State production support* as books which have print runs of 1,500⁷⁹ but only go through 400?
- How is *editing and digitalisation* of unavailable but frequently requested earlier literature to be financed?
- What will be the attitude to the PoD concept taken by important players, above all in *libraries and education*, who I have only mentioned in passing in this report?

APPROACHING THE NEW MILLENNIUM

It is only when these and a lot of other questions can be answered that an answer can also be given to the question with which I began: “Will digital and tele-borne technology be able to revive the publication and improve the distribution of books which are not big sellers, do not ride on passing trends and are not written in any of the big international languages?” Perhaps this will already be possible when we enter 2000. If so, I hope to return with a further description of the culturally interesting process which has just started.

(31st March – 3rd April 1998)

78 – through bookshops, libraries or their own use of the Internet –

79 – the minimum edition for State production support –

Recent TeLDOK publications

TeLDOK publications printed 1993 and later can be ordered, free of charge in single copies (SEK 50 a copy in larger quantities), from www.teldok.framfab.se/reports/order.htm, by mail from teldok@ett.se, by phone +46 650 801 02 or by fax to +46 650 800 08. Please quote the publication number to ensure prompt handling!

- TeLDOK Report ("Rapport")**
- 122E One book at a time.** Print on Demand. October 1998.
- 122 En bok i sänder. Print on Demand. June 1998.
- 121 Elektronisk handel: Status och trender. June 1998.
- 120 Cybershoppare, intermediärer och digitala handelsmän. Elektronisk handel i ett hushållsperspektiv. June 1998.
- 119 Vårdkedjan och informationstekniken. Erfarenheter av datorstöd för sjukvårdens informationsfloder. February 1998.
- 118 Klarar den svenska offentlighetsprincipen mötet med Cyberrymden? February 1998.
- 117 IT i arbetsliv och samhälle. Ett rundabordssamtal med mänskliga perspektiv. December 1997.
- 116 The TeLDOK Yearbook 1997.** December 1997.
- 115 Internetanvändningen i Sveriges befolkning. Juni 1997.
- 114 Singapore—livet på den intelligenta ön. Maj 1997.
- 113 IT för samhällsservice. demokrati och folkbildning i Sverige. Mars 1997.
- 112 Den valbara tekniken. Mars 1997.
- 111E IT—Visions at work.** December 1997.
- 111 IT-visioner i verkligheten. January 1997.
- 110 Informationsteknik för resurssnål logistik. December 1996.
- 109 IT-företag i samverkan—nätverk för bättre affärer. December 1996.
- 108 IT—några skolexempel från Mitt-norrland. October 1996.
- 107 Nyttan av elektronisk affärskommunikation för småföretag. June 1996.
- 106 Teknik i butik—informationsteknologi i svensk dagligvaruhandel. June 1996.
- 105 Resor i rum och tid. April 1996.
- 104 Utan IT stannar marknaden. April 1996.
- 103 Lär vid din läst. December 1995.
- 102 Omsorg med IT på äldre da'r. December 1995.
- 101E 20 seconds to work. Home-based telework.** November 1995.
- 101 20 sekunder till jobbet. Distansarbete från bostaden. October 1995.
- 100 IT i skolan. August 1995.
- 99 Den grafiska branschens utveckling mot digital kommunikation. August 1995.
- 98 Företagande i informationsteknologi. ... July 1995.
- 97 Våga Vara Visionär. Om att använda videokonferenser idag och imorgon. June 1995.
- 96 Sett och Hört via bildkommunikation. June 1995.
- 95 Tillväxtföretagen och de teleanknutna informationssystemen. May 1995.
- 94E IT myths.** (*Translation, with an addendum, of Report 94.*) November 1996.
- 94 Myter om IT. April 1995.
- TeLDOK-Info**
- 17 Smarta kort – den smartaste lösningen? Juni 1997.
- Via TeLDOK**
- 33 Demokratin i det högfrekventa samhället: Från en ATP-fråga på tio år till tio ATP-frågor på ett år. June 1998.
- 32 IT-ism—Informationstekniken som vision och verklighet. April 1998.
- 31 Vill Du bli nådd?—för och emot att vara ständigt uppkopplad, April 1998.
- 30 Från grovarbetare till nätsurfare? April 1998.
- 29 Informationsteknik—reflexer av det mänskliga. December 1997.
- 28E The building of a World Industry—The Impact of Entrepreneurship on Swedish Mobile Telephony.** February 1997.
- 28 Så byggdes en världsindustri—entreprenörskapets betydelse för svensk mobiltelefoni. January 1997.