

*'The Lovely Serendipitous Experience of the Bookshop':
A Study of UK Bookselling Practices (1997-2014).*



Scene from Black Books, 'Elephants and Hens', Series 3, Episode 2

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Introduction

'Bookshops are a hugely important part of getting people reading. If we weren't there, there would be an awful lot less reading and less books being sold'.¹

James Daunt

Since the demise of the Net Book Agreement (NBA) in 1997 the UK book retail sector has undergone a veritable revolution. The NBA was originally introduced to the UK in the 1890s as a means to regulate a volatile market with intensive price competition. The Agreement represented an arrangement for the collective enforcement of Resale Price Management (RPM) and acted as a legal accord between publishers and booksellers which was intended to maintain the harmony and health of the British book trade.² Despite the relative stability the Agreement brought it was criticised and opposed throughout the twentieth century by those who felt the book trade should be a free market. After a period of renewed criticism in the 1990s the Agreement collapsed in 1995 and was formally revoked in March 1997 when it was announced illegal by the Restrictive Practices Court (RPC).

Writing for *Publishers Weekly* industry commentator Liz Thompson aptly describes the climate of the bookselling field from 1997 to 2007 as one of rapid growth and contraction.³ The focus for this dissertation will be the turbulent years of 1997 to 2014 when the NBA's official abolition acted as a catalyst for change in UK bookselling. The RPC's decision to dissolve the Agreement legitimised the rapid expansion of the chains and the de-netting of publisher's lists that had occurred since 1995.⁴ New agents enticed by the free market such as the US superstore, supermarkets and online retailer have since entered the UK bookselling field in a serious way. This contributed to a period of intensification of issues already visible in UK bookselling regarding discounting, declining title output and the erosion of the independent bookseller's market share. This dissertation intends to study the long term effects of the NBA's abolition on the current position and persona of the UK bookseller. It will present the argument that the NBA's fall acted as an instigator for structural change regarding competition between agents in

¹ A. Flood, 'Waterstones Boss James Daunt: 'We can sell enough books to stay alive'', *The Guardian*, 28 February 2014. <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/28/waterstones-james-daunt-interview-books-bookshops-ebooks>> (14 July 2014).

² Publishers would set a fixed or 'net' retail price for each book they published and booksellers would comply with the Agreement in order to establish favourable discounts and maintain a sustainable margin.

³ L. Thompson, 'UK Bookselling Adjusting to the New Normal', *Publishers Weekly*, 260 (2013), 5-6.

⁴ The term 'de-netting' refers to the practice of offering promotions on titles that ordinarily would have been net titles and thus not to be discounted on. It was a departure from the model where publishers set the price.

UK bookselling which has eventually led to both the chain and independent bookseller presenting themselves as central to the community via personalised selling and localised literary events.

Supporters believe that any form of RPM such as the NBA or a Fixed Book Price (FBP) are integral to providing a sustainable and stable book industry where a wide variety of titles are available from both small and large retailers. FBP supporters believe that as objects of culture, books have a special value in that they are indispensable to our individual development, as well as to society. It is assumed that in the absence of FBP independent booksellers are inherently weaker in price battles with companies who can sell bestselling new releases as loss leaders. To support their claims FBP proponents emphasise that France (with RPM) has 2,500 independent booksellers, representing 22% of total sales whereas in the UK one third of independent bookstores have closed since 2005 and now represent only 4% of the market.⁵ Conversely, critics of FBP dispute whether countries with fixed prices take any more risks than those who maintain a free market, and question whether FBP increases the cost of books.⁶ They believe that governments should support the book industry by more imaginative policies on literacy such as bookshop subsidisation and the development of the nation's creative industries, as opposed to making competition policy exemptions.

Most contemporary and current spokespeople in the discussion surrounding the NBA align themselves with the stagnant and conventional arguments for and against RPM. Supporters of the NBA predicted that a culture of discounting and an emphasis on bestsellers would emerge from the loss of RPM, and that this would eventually hinder independent bookstores and the diversity of titles in the UK market.⁷ One of the more perceptive and comprehensive portrayals regarding the anticipated effects of the demise of the NBA comes from Ross Shimmon, the Library Association's chief executive. He predicted a rise in price for specialist publications, heavy discounting of high volume mass market books, problems for small libraries arising from their inability to command large discounts, a reduction in the quality of supplier services and increased pressure to concentrate on high volume, mass market publications.⁸ Some of the less apocalyptic predictions accepted that the loss of the NBA may open up avenues of enterprise for even the smallest and most independent-minded booksellers, who may previously have been hindered by co-operative buying and market initiatives.⁹ The confusing reality is that both eventualities have since emerged. But what was not explicitly

⁵ International Publishers Association, 'Global Fixed Book Price Report', 23 May 2013 <<http://www.internationalpublishers.org/images/stories/news/FBP.pdf>> (5 July 2014).

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ F. Fishwick, 'Book Prices in the UK since the End of Resale Price Management', *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, 15 (2008), 359-377.

⁸ 'Librarians Face the Future with Fear and Trembling', *The Bookseller*, 6 October 1995, 10.

⁹ 'A Turning Point in Our History', *The Bookseller*, 29 September 1995, 8.

predicted at the time was the long term redefining of the role of the bookseller that would arise from the loss of any form of resale price management.

Generally, academic debate regarding the impact of the fall of the NBA is linked to discounting and is predominantly concerned with the economic implications of the Agreements collapse. One of the prominent writers on the subject is the economist Francis Fishwick who wrote the seminal paper based on two bookseller surveys from 1995 and 1997 titled *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement* (1998).¹⁰ Fishwick argues that in order to justify RPM on cultural grounds it is necessary to demonstrate by economic analysis how it will lead to cultural gain. As an advocate of RPM his report promotes caution particularly regarding booksellers who rely on a title becoming a bestseller. He wisely predicted that non traditional agents will quickly and easily undercut prices and that will be to the detriment of the industry.¹¹ It is a useful but as an economist he is not woefully concerned with the evolving cultural implications or the more complex reaction of the bookseller to competition. More recent studies also focus on economic issues such as the impact of RPM on book prices.¹²

The argument that still receives less attention from academics concerns the long term ramifications of having a free market on the positions of competition between those within the bookselling field. A 2008 economic based report by the University of East Anglia for the Office of Fair Trading does briefly consider the wider implications of new agents entering the book retail industry. The writers invaluable compare the UK bookselling industry to countries who have maintained versions of RPM to conclude that the loss of the NBA facilitated rapid growth in the market share of online retailers and supermarkets.¹³ It cites the slower growth of online retailers such as Amazon.com in Germany as an example that the absence of RPM has been a discernible feature in the trajectory, structure and discounting of UK bookselling.¹⁴ Similarly, Jennifer Gardiner's report into the impact of Internet retailing on UK bookselling attributes the end of the NBA as the single most important factor in the rapid rise of the online retailer.¹⁵ These studies are helpful for legitimising the argument that the fall of the NBA continues to influence the bookselling field today. This dissertation hopes to add to this rarely considered perspective by more specifically analysing how these new agents altered how the chain and

¹⁰ F. Fishwick & S. Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement* (Cranfield School of Management, May 1998), 8.

¹¹ Fishwick & Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book*, 131.

¹² See, M. Utton, 'Books Are Not Different After All: Observations on the Formal Ending of the Net Book Agreement in the UK', *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, 7 (2000), 115-126, S. Yamey, *Resale Price Maintenance and Shopper's Choice* (London: Institute of Economic Affairs, 1960), Fishwick, 'Book Prices in the UK Since the End of Resale Price Management', *International Journal of the Economics of Business*, 15 (2008), 373.

¹³ International Publishers Association, 'Global Fixed Book Price Report', 23 May 2013.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ J. Gardiner, 'Reformulating the Reader: Internet Bookselling and its Impact on the Construction of Reading Practices', *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, 9 (2010), 161-168.

independent booksellers position themselves within both the book retail industry and the book trade.

Although there are some valid insights into bookselling such as Arthur Mumby and Ian Norrie's *Publishing and Bookselling* (1974) and John Thompson's *Merchants of Culture* (2010) there is a deficit of focussed UK based analysis regarding the recent history of the bookseller. In his 2009 work *Beyond the Book* Darnton declares that bookselling is the least familiar link in the diffusion process from author to reader, and proclaims that more attention should be addressed to this middleman who mediates between supply and demand.¹⁶ This study endeavours to respond to Darnton's emphatic protestation that the bookseller is often overlooked in favour of the publisher. It has established a gap in the academic discourse regarding the long term ramifications of the NBA and aims to utilise key theories and historical context to present a more nuanced argument concerning the recent redefining of the bookseller's role.

It will argue that after an initial period of confusion the bookseller has increasingly responded to the far reaching results of the RPC's decision in 1997 by presenting itself as a local and cultural agent with close ties to the community.¹⁷ The term local and cultural is a broad expression designed to describe the current trend in specialist chain and independent bookshop practices. This includes the decentralisation of book buying and the customisation of services through the application of destination stores and cultural book based experiences such as literary events and author talks. These practices manifest themselves as local in that that each are focussed on providing a customised service for a target audience which is often the community within the vicinity of the premises. Such practices are essential to presenting the bricks and mortar bookshop brand as worthy of repeat visits. In this respect the idea of local and cultural has strong associations with the bookseller's traditional role as a personable agent within the community. However, the rapid changes to the book trade field since the 1970s exacerbated by the NBA's termination imply that any return to this role is with a very different mindset. The emphasis on competition and the subsequent loss of independent retailers due to poor sales and conglomeration suggests that those booksellers that remain are more adept at finding niches with which to compete and survive.

Prior to the Agreement's collapse the independent and specialist chain were focussed on a similar book buyer and both promoted their expertise knowledge. The strong position of non traditional booksellers after 1997 has had far reaching implications for the structures of competition within the bookselling field and on other agents within the book trade. When the

¹⁶ R. Darnton, *The Case for Books: Past, Present and Future* (New York: Public Affairs, 2009), 200.

¹⁷ Although this approach is relatively universal for international bookselling this thesis aims to highlight that the ubiquity and strength of non traditional retailers and the impact that this has had on bricks and mortar booksellers has so far been greater and thus methods of response have been more pronounced than in countries such as Germany and The Netherlands who have maintained forms of RPM.

chain stores initially placed themselves in a war on price they briefly overlooked the independent seller as a competitor. Conversely, in response to the NBA the independents mostly sought the more sustainable niche of local and cultural agent, and throughout the period discussed it is possible to observe the independents maturing into this role. The readjustment and realisation for the chains has been slower and more fraught, but since 2011 there has been a general shift in their bookselling practice from standardised to focussing on customised services.

This move by the chains has again restructured the book retail trade. In order to compete with the online retailer chain bookshops have emulated the practices of the independents and the promotion of similar value propositions re-establishes the competition between the two brick and mortar sellers.¹⁸ The redefining of the traditional bookshops role to this more customised and community orientated agent implies some degree of encroachment on the services provided by another agent within the field of the book trade. A final issue to consider is inspired by American sociologist Laura Miller's 1999 work on the significance of the community to shopping. She wrote that most academics in the book world focus on the fate of the retail institution and the bookshops commercialisation of community life is rarely connected to the struggles of public libraries.¹⁹ Despite being written 15 years ago this still mostly remains true. This thesis will endeavour to highlight how and why the services offered by the bookseller and the public library are becoming more similar.

As this dissertation is primarily concerned with bookseller positioning via provision of services for the general public it will not be looking at the sale of scholarly, technical, used, audio or text books. To comprehensively address the UK book retail sector this dissertation will utilise the descriptions of the roles, core values, strengths and influences of agents within the trade set out by Robert Darnton's Communication Circuit and John Thompson's book supply chain.²⁰ Primary research will rely on a diverse mixture of sources from the years 1995-2014.²¹ Recent articles interestingly address the growth of the local and cultural movement and are valuable but flawed resources for this dissertation.²² Information on the motivations and impact behind the business practices of independent stores has been collated from the careful selection

¹⁸ A value proposition is a promise of value to be delivered and acknowledged and a belief from the customer that value will be appealed and experienced.

¹⁹ L. Miller, 'Shopping for Community: The Transformation of the Bookstore into a Vital Community Institution', *Media, Culture & Society*, 21 (1999), 385-407.

²⁰ J.B Thompson, *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 15, Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 182.

²¹ Primary sources will derive from reputable publications such as the trade periodicals; *The Bookseller* and *Publishers Weekly* and newspapers such as the *Guardian*, *Independent* and *Telegraph*.

²² Considering the current contraction of the book trade it is possible that industry professionals writing editorial pieces or being interviewed will seek to soothe their investors or supporters and address any issue by finding a viable answer.

of interviewees from four independent bookshops.²³ Articles alongside industry reports from eminent library organisations such as the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP), government reports and editorials from the academic journal *Logos*, will be paramount to understanding the current position of the bookseller in relation to the UK's public libraries.²⁴ Additional discussion influential to this thesis are observations looking at bookselling from a more practical perspective such as marketing and business practice, and works which consider the impact of digital on book buying such as Christopher Anderson's 2008 work discussing *The Long Tail* phenomenon.

To convincingly cover the defined period and all relevant issues this dissertation will be divided into four chapters. The first is designed to describe the bookseller and the libraries role from a conceptual perspective, offer definitions and introduce key theories from Darnton and sociologist Pierre Bourdieu regarding what influences and motivates booksellers and how they struggle for power within their own field. The second chapter provides a contextual insight into events that both derive from the NBA and have occurred in UK bookselling since 1997 and will utilise the defining of pressures already set out by Darnton's model. The third chapter discusses how bookselling practices have changed and presents the observation that since 2007 both chain and independent bookstores have redefined their roles in order to pursue the path of local and cultural agent. Intrinsic to this idea is the concept of the 'third place' defined by sociologists Ramon Oldenburg and Dennis Brissett as a space characterised by sociability and non-discursive symbolism which provides perspective and emotional expressiveness.²⁵ It will present the discussion on the bookshop as a 'third place' posed by Robert Gordon University academics Jo Royle and Audrey Laing and American sociologist Laura Miller, and will consider how this is central to the concept of local and cultural, and why the practice is so integral to responding to the current demands of the consumer.²⁶

The final chapter will build on these conclusions and relate them more specifically to the growing community based role of the bookseller. The community role will be explained and a comment that the public library and bookseller's services are converging will be presented. This idea is not intended to act as a statement on whether such an eventuality is negative or positive, or speculate whether either entity deserves government intervention or subsidisation. It is more of an observation that both agents are looking to engage with and connect with the consumer in a way that guarantees their survival during a period of contraction brought on by the impact of digital and the events of the 1990s. Such practices present the bookshop and

²³ These have been selected on the basis of quality and geographical distribution.

²⁴ T. Coates, 'The Scandalous Decline of Britain's Public Libraries', *Logos*, 19 (2008), 5-10.

²⁵ R. Oldenburg & D. Brissett, "The Third Place", *Qualitative Sociology*, 5 (1982), 265-284.

²⁶ A. Laing & J. Royle, 'Examining Chain Bookshops in the Context of "Third Place"', *International Journal of Retail & Distribution Management*, 41 (2013), 1-28. Miller, 'Shopping for Community', 406.

library as a customised and cultural experience with close ties to the community. This represents a departure from the homogenised and standardised bookshop of the early 2000s and signifies a revival in what bookseller Tim Coates poetically terms a 'lovely serendipitous experience'.²⁷

²⁷ S. Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling', *The Guardian*, 10 November 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/nov/10/waterstones-high-street-Bookselling>> (14 July 2014).

Chapter One: There is Value in the Model

'To get some distance from interdisciplinarity run riot'.²⁸

Robert Darnton

This chapter seeks to introduce key terms, models and theories related to the bookshop and one other agent, the library. It will provide definitions of the two agents and analyse their position within Darnton's Communication Circuit and Thompson's book trade supply chain. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's definition of a cultural mediator and theories related to *habitus*, the field and flow of capital will also be presented. Thompson's more specific application of Bourdieu's ideas to the book trade will also be introduced as a way to show that internal struggles for power influence an agent's role. The overarching concept is that the positions of the bookshop and library are not fixed. They are each subject to external pressures and their own internal struggle for power via the accumulation of different forms of capital.

Any definition of the bookseller is difficult to reach due to the constant adaption and evolution of the trade. Generally, a bookseller can be an individual or corporation but they should execute the last point of sale between the primary and secondary market.²⁹ Thompson defines the retail bookseller as someone who stocks and displays books and who seeks to sell them to individual consumers or readers.³⁰ This is an acceptable definition but in the work *Publishing and Bookselling* Frank Mumby describes the placing of shops such as the UK bookshop and stationer WH Smith, whose primary selling points are not books as a unique and complicated process.³¹ Since the publication of this edition in 1974 the process of definition has increased in complexity.

Bookshops can, and often do sell additional product lines such as newspapers, stationery and maps, but an important distinction for the purposes of this thesis is between the traditional and non traditional retailer. Throughout the 1990s the introduction of new kinds of booksellers such as supermarkets, online retailers and US superstores who either offer numerous items other than books or represent a serious threat to bookshops present before 1997 are regarded here as non traditional retailers or external agents. These new businesses have fundamentally altered the UK landscape of book retail and the ways in which books are

²⁸ Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 179.

²⁹ The primary market is between the wholesaler to the bookseller and secondary market is from the bookseller to the reader or consumer. A 'consumer' is someone who purchases books intending to disseminate it in other ways such as a gift while a 'reader' is understood as an individual who purchases a book for personal reasons and intends to read the book for study, work or pleasure.

³⁰ Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 17.

³¹ F. Mumby & I. Norrie, *Publishing and Bookselling* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1974), 535.

produced, bought and sold, but they are not in the traditional sense, booksellers. A bricks and mortar retailer refers to the independent bookshop and those businesses widely acknowledged by the industry to be specialist chains such as Waterstones, Dillons and Ottakar's.³² Despite the disparities in style and approach these bookshops are defined as traditional because they predate the collapse of the Agreement and focus or focussed on the selling of books to the consumer or reader.

In terms of initial definition there is little point of comparison between a library and bookshop. A public library is an organised collection of sources of information made accessible to a defined community for reference or borrowing. Ideally, public and institutional collections and services are intended for use by people who choose not to or cannot afford to purchase an extensive collection themselves. As a funded institution the library is deeply affected by political discourse and policy making at all levels of government, with decisions shaping budgets, freedom of access, intellectual property and management perspectives. This all influence the libraries ability to engage with and serve their communities. Similar to a bookshop owner, the librarian acts as both curator and consumer in that they both select and purchase the books from a wholesaler with an additional user in mind.

Many public libraries also serve as community organisations that provide free services and events to the public, such as reading groups and children's story time. A CILIP report written in 2010 describes a public library as an institution which provides a, 'positive experience for local people, and articulates the value of a local authority on its community'.³³ Due to recent government public spending cuts and changes to the book trade the library visitor has evolved from a passive entity to a consumer who in the future is likely to dictate library terms and services in a way that is not dissimilar to the bookshops past and current audience. This is because libraries are now invariably accountable to user and engagement figures which are then used to address whether the institution remaining opening is financially viable. This implies that the library is currently only ostensibly outside of market logic and the reactionary business practices essential to ensuring survival in competitive fields.

Both the library and bookseller feature in Thompson's book supply chain model. As a supply chain the model represents the series of independent but interconnected organisations which are situated at specific points and are present to perform certain tasks or functions. The supply chain represents a structured series of links by which the book is gradually produced and transmitted via distributors to retailers and to an end user of a consumer or institution such

³² The distinction between chain and independent is made based on the size of the enterprise and whether the business had numerous, nationally dispersed stores.

³³ CILIP Report, 'What Makes a Good Library Service: Guidelines on Public Library Provision in England for Portfolio Holders in Local Councils', December 2010
<http://www.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/What_makes_a_good_library_service_CILIP_guidelines_0.pdf> (21 June 2014).

as a library. The basic steps follow from the author supplying the manuscript or file to the publisher, who carries out a range of functions before delivering the final text to the printer, who prints and binds the books and delivers them to the distributor, who warehouses the stock and fulfils orders from both retailers and wholesalers who in turn fulfil orders from both individual consumers/readers and institutions. The selections made are then presented by retailers or placed in institutions such as libraries.

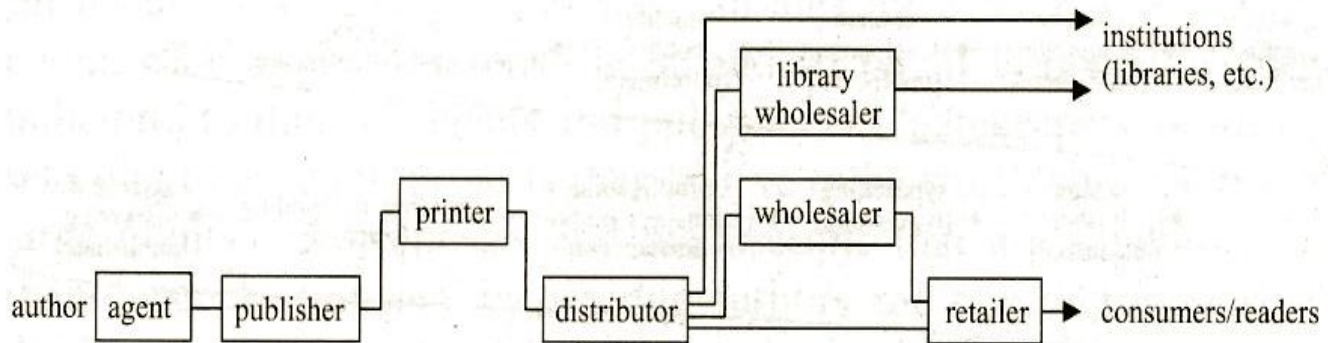


Figure 1: Thompson's Book Supply Chain Model.³⁴

Thompson's model was created to observe added value in the market and is a functional depiction of the relative positions of the retailer and the library within the book trade. Within the supply chain, library wholesalers and wholesalers sell separately to library institutions and retailers. For the consumer of books there is the extra link of retailer whereas libraries are perceived to be the end users. The value of Thompson's model to this thesis is that it acknowledges that the retailer is an agent which provides for, and is close to the consumer and reader, but it is also intriguing why libraries are not portrayed to have a reader or at least a user. It is likely that this is because Thompson's chain presents added value, and library patrons offer little or no money in return for the books they purchase. It seems odd that the supply model does not acknowledge this vital link and this will become more apparent as public libraries increasingly have to communicate their value to their users.

³⁴ Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 15.

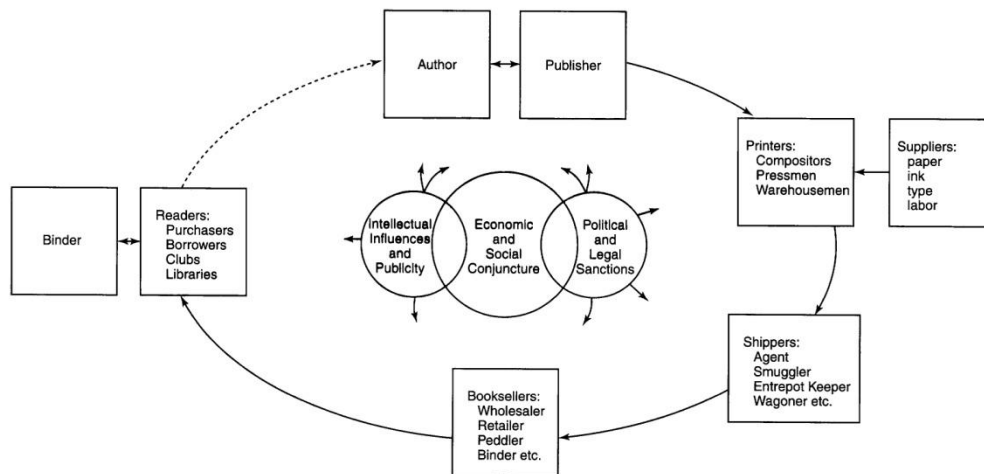


Figure 2: Darnton's Communication Circuit.³⁵

Darnton's Communication Circuit is particularly useful for understanding the book trade as an organic, ecological process which Darnton himself believes is open to interpretation.³⁶ It was first introduced to gain some distance from the 'interdisciplinarity run riot' of the history of books and its many ancillary disciplines and to understand the lifecycle of the book regardless of time and place.³⁷ The model shows the patterns of interrelation according to specialisation and demonstrates their relationship with one another. The model divides the book trade into the six main specialisations of author, publisher, printer, shipper, bookseller and reader. The reader completes the circuit because he influences the author both before and after the act of composition. The circuit offers perspective on certain aspects of the industry while also emphasising that the various participants should 'avoid being fragmented into esoteric categories, cut off from each other by arcane techniques and mutual misunderstanding.'³⁸ This stress on the interconnectedness of the agents highlights how no position with the model is necessarily fixed and each agent, and the book trade as a whole are subject to pressures which alter the roles of those within the trade.

Darnton's model specifically highlights the external factors which influence but are not necessarily part of the book trade. These include economic and social conjuncture, political and

³⁵ Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 181.

³⁶ For example, it is apparent that certain agents such as 'smuggler' are no longer applicable to the twenty-first century book trade.

³⁷ Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 179.

³⁸ Darnton, *The Case for Books*, 180.

legal sanctions and intellectual influences and publicity. These pressures have the power to affect both the trade as whole and specific agents. Pressures can be represented by changes in economic thought such as the laissez-faire practices of the UK in the 1980s or religious embargos, while political and legal sanctions are indicative of RPM or horizontal agreements such as the NBA.³⁹ The external factors influencing the book trade demonstrate that each agent's position is subject to change.

Darnton's circuit places the retailer as separate and far from the library and reader. Libraries are connected to readers within this model, whereas retailers are far more associated with sales and distribution. Considering the bookseller's revived symbiotic relationship with consumers and readers, and the development of a more demanding library user the retailer and library could be thought of as closer together. Thompson's model indicates that both agents are served by a wholesaler whereas no such affordance is apparent in Darnton's depiction of the trade. There appears to be no acknowledgement that like libraries, retailers also curate and purchase their collection with a reader in mind. The two models valuably offer an understanding of the *status quo* regarding the positions of each agent and their different portrayals demonstrate that both are open to interpretation.

Beyond the external pressures defined by Darnton each agent is subject to the internal struggle within their specific *habitus* for power and dominance. Considering the fragility of the book trade it is plausible that a struggle for symbolic power and the methods use to accrue and communicate such a position could impact on other agents within the trade such as the library. The ideas of Bourdieu presented in the edited collection of his essays *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) are particularly constructive for understanding the specific internal processes of the agents within the book retail field. Bourdieu liberally describes cultural mediators as individuals or organisations in occupations involving the presentation and representation in all institutions providing symbolic goods and services in cultural production and organisation.⁴⁰ Thus, although chain bookstores are more associated with commerce than their more localised and idiosyncratic independent counterpart they are still both considered within the definition of cultural mediator. This is because the two agents primarily and for the foreseeable future deal with the culturally symbolic good of the book.

Bourdieu specifically describes a field as a structured space of social positions where resources and power are fixed within the context of competition and reward.⁴¹ He perceives the field in terms beyond internal analysis and reductionist thought and opts to consider events or

³⁹ An alternative model which focuses on the survival of the trade from external pressures, and that is championed by Darnton features in T. Adams & N. Barker, *A Potencie of Life: Books in Society: The Clark Lectures 1986-1986* (London: The British Library, 1993).

⁴⁰ P. Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production: Essays on Art and Literature* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993), 6.

⁴¹ P. Bourdieu, 'Social Space and Symbolic Power', *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1989), 14-25.

actions within a complex network of social relations. In any field agents engage in competition for control of interests or resources which are specific to the field in question. Fields valuably allow the reader to engage with agents from varying organisations whose influence and power often fluctuate. The idea helps draw attention to the fact that the power of any agent or organisation within a field is dependent upon the capital it possesses. Thompson describes the four main types of capital to be economic, human, intellectual and symbolic. Economic capital is the accumulated financial resources, including stock and capital reserves, human capital is the staff employed by the firm and their accumulated knowledge. Symbolic capital is the accrued prestige and status and intellectual capital consists of the rights that a bookseller controls. All forms of capital are relational and integral to the success of an agent, but the structure of a bookselling field is shaped above all by the distribution of symbolic and economic capital. This is because the combination of the two influences both the businesses buying power and how the public and those within the industry perceives the authority of the bookshop.

Thompson interprets the unique dynamic of each field as the 'logic of the field', consisting of a complex network of organisations and agents who are tied together in relations of cooperation, competition and interdependency.⁴² He astutely argues that applying the field to the book trade is vital when the alternative is the restrictive concept of the market.⁴³ In essence it is important when considering the book trade to think of fields as more than markets, but markets as integral parts of fields. Bourdieu's value to this thesis is that he believes that literature and art and their respective producers do not exist independently from the complex institutional framework which authorises, enables, empowers and legitimises them. By using Bourdieu it is possible to explain the phenomenon of utilising non-economic actions, as economic practices directed towards the maximising of material or symbolic profit.⁴⁴ It will become apparent that this is particularly integral to the chain's adoption of the local and cultural movement.

In the edited book, *A Companion to Book History* Simon Eliot and Jonathan Rose aptly describe the interrelated and symbiotic relationship of the book, its reader and the many mediums between. They say, 'no book is created solely by its author... critics, booksellers, and educational bureaucrats can proclaim a book a classic or consign it to oblivion.'⁴⁵ But it is also a precarious ecosystem where each agent's power is relative and changing. In 2011 Miha Kovač hypothesised that the communication circuit of a book changes, when the device with which

⁴² Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 3.

⁴³ This is particularly useful when looking at both the library and bookseller, where one operates within a market while the other, due to being publically funded ostensibly operates outside of market logic.

⁴⁴ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 9.

⁴⁵ S. Eliot & J. Rose, *A Companion to the History of the Book* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 1.

book content is accessed changes.⁴⁶ In the relative field of the book trade the introduction of e-readers, online bookselling and the growth of online reading challenge agent's traditional roles. Gordon Graham's, *Essays on the International Book Business* (1994) inspirationally discusses the erosion of the book supply chain which has served society since the introduction of printing and postulates that the commercial success or failure of the booksellers is now less vital than their social role.⁴⁷ This is an accurate and interesting prediction as UK booksellers since the collapse of the NBA have sought to convey their value by promoting their physical store as a social enabler.

⁴⁶ M. Kovač, 'The End of Codex and the Disintegration of the Communication Circuit of the Book', *Logos*, 22 (2011), 12-24.

⁴⁷ G. Graham, *As I Was Saying: Essays on the International Book Business* (London: Hans Zell Publishers, 1994), 123.

Chapter Two: Change and the Bookshop

*'I thought the book trade was pretty much a closed shop, simply because I didn't use bookshops when I was a kid. I think a lot of working-class people would have felt that.'*⁴⁸

Louie Frost, Bookseller

Proprietor of independent bookshop 'Browsers Bookshop' Martin Grindley wisely prophesied in 1996 that, 'when an industry faces a cataclysmic period of change, most people overestimate the short term effects and underestimate the long term ones.'⁴⁹ In order to understand why bookselling has gradually changed it is first important to establish the external pressures and technological advancements which have affected the bookshops since 1997. Many of these derive in some way from the abolition of the NBA and there is a consensus amongst academics that the event facilitated the entry of new competition from powerful agents such as supermarkets, online retailers and US style superstores.⁵⁰ Contemporary news articles describe the demise of the NBA as a 'turning point in the trades' history which came quickly leaving it incapable of an orderly transition.'⁵¹ The lack of any decisive answer to the new threats and changes in the structure of bookselling suggest why some of the repercussions of the NBA have taken so long to materialise.

The external pressures presented in Darnton's circuit advantageously focus analysis on the wider context and remind the reader to consider the broader pressures facing the book trade. Darnton describes how outside influences could vary endlessly but for the sake of coherence he opted to reduce the latter to the three general categories of economic and social conjuncture, political and legal sanctions and intellectual influences and publicity.⁵² The following events are placed chronologically but should not be thought of as a linear narrative. The purpose is to build a framework by which the current services provided by booksellers are explained, compared and addressed. To better understand current practices this chapter will first look at the period prior to the NBA and the context of its demise.

⁴⁸ S. Bradley, *The British Book Trade: An Oral History* (London: The British Library, 2008), 64.

⁴⁹ 'Celebrate to Commiserate' *The Bookseller*, 27 September 1996, 12-13.

⁵⁰ See, J. Dearnley & J. Feather, 'The UK Bookselling Trade Without Resale Price Maintenance: An Overview of Change 1995-2001', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, 17 (2002), 16-31, E. House, 'Challenges Facing the UK Book Industry', *Publishers Research Quarterly*, 29 (2011), 211-219, N. Gorecki, 'Give bricks-and-mortar bookselling a future', *The Guardian*, 25 August 2011 <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2011/aug/25/bookshops-bookselling-future>> (6 July 2014).

⁵¹ 'A Turning Point in Our History', *The Bookseller*, 29 September 1995, 8.

⁵² Darnton, *The Case For Books*, 179.

The services that a bookseller provides have never been fixed and are often a result of competition for trade and a product of changing approaches to publishing. In 1661 the London bookseller Francis Kirkman opened the capital's first circulating library which was introduced as a way to increase the bookseller's profit. The development from bookseller to retail bookseller also first occurred in London in the eighteenth century. Since this time retailers followed their market from central London to the cheaper and more populated areas such as Islington in North London. This suggests an early understanding of the importance of the consumer to survival. Any stability of the book retail trade that was apparent in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was short lived. After the Campbell Committee reported against fixed prices in 1852, the regulatory body of the Booksellers' Association dissolved itself.⁵³ This inaugurated a period of unrestricted competition which amounted to a serious crisis in the trade. By the 1880s many of the circulating libraries no longer received enough time to distribute first editions before the publisher produced a much cheaper second edition.

The only way that these libraries could compete was in the used book sector or by selling off copies to even more provincial markets. Although this was a result of the publisher's actions it also meant that publishers were at risk of being cut off from their market by a lack of stockholding booksellers who could afford to supply the most popular and fast selling books which demonstrates the interdependency of agents within the book trade. Many booksellers failed during this time and those that were successful often sold faster moving products alongside books such as newspapers, stationery, and patent medicines. Some of the events that occurred in the free market of the 1850s have also emerged since the NBA's collapse. This should not be disregarded as coincidental. The precedent suggests the inherent and cyclical nature of a trade without any form of RPM. It reveals that in response to external pressures or possible extinction booksellers will pragmatically adapt to consumer demand by diversifying business practices. Under the guidance of the publisher Frederick Macmillan (1851-1936), the regulative net book system formally known as the NBA was introduced in 1891 and established in 1901.

In the oral history book, *The British Book Trade* (2008) secretary and chief of the Publisher's Association, Clive Bradley aptly described the NBA as 'loosely horizontal and self regulating by nature'.⁵⁴ A publisher was free to set their own prices except on net titles which would be enforced through the Publishers Association. The NBA is representative of one of Darnton's political and legal sanctions, and over the course of the twentieth century was criticised for being inhibitive. In 1959 the Agreement was referred to the RPC where the case

⁵³ The Campbell Committee was a committee in the 1850s which sat to discuss the possible free trade of bookselling.

⁵⁴ Bradley, *The British Book Trade*, 225.

was heard in 1962. The Registrar of the Restrictive Trading Agreement argued in court that the NBA was an illegal price-fixing cartel which acted against the public interest. At the time most publishers and booksellers argued that, given the cultural and educational value of books it was in the public interest to have a wide network of stockholding bookstores. The Chairman ruled in favour of the Agreement and it continued on, albeit briefly till 1997.

The favourable decision in 1962 in comparison to the verdict to abolish the NBA in 1997 implies that there were significant changes which altered the perceptions of the booksellers, publishers and public from favouring protectionist sanctions to championing the free market. Reflective of this belief is Ian Norrie's affirmations that by the late 1960s the stationer and bookseller WH Smith had already started cutting its collection of books to those that were expected to sell better.⁵⁵ This reflects a concerted decision to separate the bookseller from its quest for dominance via its symbolic status to gaining competitive advantage via sales and market domination which from the 1980s became universal practice. In the 1970s the UK book trade was a mature and modern industry, but after this decade the sector would be deeply affected by conglomeration, the growth of indigenous book publishing in former colonies and the constriction of public library funding.

From the years 1982-1990 the industry again changed dramatically. Returning from the USA in 1981 the former WH Smith employee Tim Waterstone opened his first store. Established in 1982 the original Waterstones was located opposite Foyle's bookstore in London.⁵⁶ Waterstones' were large bookshops often found in central, high-street locations that focussed on backlist titles, literary authors and choice. They were established as a 'different breed of bookshop', where the idea was to provide a service with an extraordinary inventory, well informed staff and a belief in the transference of independent selling methods through chains. The introduction and success of Waterstones started a movement from shops with fragmented specialist areas, to a trade where new groups of companies were formed and rapidly expanded.

From 1986 the book retail group Pentos brought out a national chain of bookstores under the formerly academic bookshop brand, Dillons. In 1987 Ottakar's bookshop was introduced by James Heanage and initially targeted small and medium sized towns in Southern England. These three main chains competed against one another and over the course of the 1980s and 1990s siphoned market share away from the formerly dominant WH Smith. When the rivalry between Dillons and Waterstones reached a zenith in the 1990s the period of expansion was followed by an era of consolidation. Between 1989 and 1993 WH Smith acquired

⁵⁵ Mumby & Norrie, *Publishing and Bookselling*, 535.

⁵⁶ Although the bookshop was originally 'Waterstone's' for the purposes of continuity it will be referred to as 'Waterstones'.

all of Waterstones' shares. Acting as an autonomous brand within the WH Smith group Waterstones became the leading specialist bookseller in the UK.

Following these fundamental shifts in bookselling the NBA faced renewed criticism in the early 1990s. National expansion created new pressures on the old values of the NBA. It was expected that organisations with many broadly dispersed individual units are less likely to suffer as a result of the introduction of price competition. For example, head of the Pentos Group Terry Maher described the NBA as an 'irritant for national chains'.⁵⁷ A significant number of national retailers and consumer publishers wanted to experiment with discounting in the hope that lower prices would drive a higher volume of sales. In 1991 following a price promotion by Dillons, Waterstones decided to pursue its own discounting policy on selected lines. Prolonged criticism and the undermining of the Agreement resulted in the Director General of the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) deciding in 1994 that that the NBA should be placed under review.

An instrumental player in the NBA's initial ruin in 1995 was WH Smith retail director, Peter Bamford who is described by the *Bookseller* as someone who is only interested in short term profit.⁵⁸ His involvement is in stark comparison to those booksellers who defended the Agreement at its 1962 trial. It demonstrates that the period of conglomeration that predates the NBA's downfall irrevocably altered how bookseller's acted making them more reactionary and focussed on competition for commercial success. In September 1995 the publishing firms Random House and Harper Collins both announced they would no longer be bound by the Agreement, and unsurprisingly shortly after the retailer, WH Smith, previously one of the staunchest defenders of the NBA announced a major de-netted promotion. The de-netting of books from Harper Collins and Random House signified the *de facto* end of the NBA. Fishwick describes the announcement by the two publishers as starting a rapid domino effect towards the official rescinding of the NBA.⁵⁹ The main supporter of the Agreement the Publishers Association also decided to no longer defend it.

The political climate in the UK from the years 1979-1997 was particularly sympathetic to free trade where expansion or contraction of even cultural firms was generally accepted without intervention.⁶⁰ In fact a statement regarding the Net Book Agreement by the only publisher to attend the hearing John Calder described the dismissal of the Agreement as the,

⁵⁷ Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 52.

⁵⁸ J. Cowley, 'The Man Who Did for the NBA', *The Bookseller*, 10 November 1995, 13.

⁵⁹ Fishwick & Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement*, 2.

⁶⁰ At the time the UK context was very much focussed on free trade and economic liberalism or laissez-faire economics that was initiated by former Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government (1979-1990) and was reaffirmed by the policies of later governments from both her political successor John Major from 1990-1997 and the New Labour government led by Tony Blair in 1997.

'last act of vandalism by the Conservative government'.⁶¹ The judgement did not perceive that the public interest was being served by protecting the independent bookshop at the expense of curtailing the commercial freedom of the retail chain. It stated that both types of shop (independent and chain) are within the category of stockholding bookshop and should thus be subject to the freedoms and constraints of competition.⁶² The Court was easily persuaded that material change in business practices, print runs and technological innovation meant that the arguments accepted in 1962 were no longer viable. While some data at the time implied that supermarkets had started stocking mass-market paperbacks sold at a discount, general evidence at the court on the long term impact of such a system was lacking. The court did not foresee substantial switching of purchases of popular titles away from independent shops to retail chains, and dismissed the idea that book prices would increase without the NBA. In 1997 the court not only reversed its 1962 judgement but declared the NBA illegal.

It is evident that the eradication of the NBA was initially perceived by professionals and consumers as a success, or at least not a failure. Initially independents retained market share by improving stock management and customer order services. Only a minority of respondents cited in Fishwick's report from the 1997 survey into bookselling experienced a decrease in profitability since the end of the NBA, but yet 207 of 326 agreed with the statement that 'the new situation has produce a number of threats to my organisation.'⁶³ This loosely explains why the effects of the NBA's fall are still emerging today as most lie in the increased competition from new agents who were tempted by the free market and that became ubiquitous after 1998. Even one of the first systematic studies into the effects of the official abandonment of the NBA written in 2000 stated that for the most part the adverse predictions of those who supported the Agreement have not manifested themselves.⁶⁴

The Agreement's official termination marks the beginning of an intensification of issues that were already present in UK bookselling but were exacerbated by the lack of any form of RPM. Contemporary articles from 1997 emphasise that the once trade wide view of bookselling being long term was undermined by the NBA's dismissal and that the prevailing attitude became the 'quick fix' mentality favoured by city investors.⁶⁵ This approach indicates how economics can influence the book trade. The infiltration of organisations eager to attain better profits and improve margins undermined an agreement that had been established to encourage diversity within the industry and regulated against the formation of powerful monopolies. In an impassioned plea for the renewal of the NBA author Sam Jordison vehemently argues that since

⁶¹ J. Calder, *Statement Regarding the Net Book Agreement*, 'Book Price Agreement Clippings', Adriaan van der Weel's Private Collection, 1997.

⁶² Utton, 'Books Are Not Different After All', 121.

⁶³ Fishwick & Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement*, 86.

⁶⁴ Utton, 'Books Are Not Different After All', 124

⁶⁵ 'A Turning Point in Our History', 8.

its dismissal the market has narrowed, shelf lives of most novels are shorter, and that both independents and chains have suffered.⁶⁶ What transpires from these sources is that the effects of the NBA's dismissal are still felt and discussed today.

Sociologist Laura Miller perceptively writes that the homogenisation of the American chain from the 1980s onwards was a reflection of the modernist capitalist emphasis of mass distribution and dominance by large, public corporations.⁶⁷ A similar climate was prevalent in Britain during the 1990s and was exacerbated by the loss of any regulative legislation. The incentive to expand would have been greater after 1997 as big businesses would be able to negotiate better discounts and purchase in greater volume. For example, in order to acquire the competitors Waterstones and Dillons, the HMV media group was created in 1998 under the chairmanship of Tim Waterstone by the record label EMI and the venture capital group, Advent. It paid £300 million for 115 Waterstones stores, and £500 million for EMIs two existing chains, comprising of 78 Dillons stores and 271 HMV music stores. In 1999 Dillons shops were merged under the Waterstones brand which further strengthened the buying power of the company. Smaller chains were particularly vulnerable and over the course of the 1990s several small businesses were absorbed by medium sized chains that were seeking to strengthen their positions and attain better discounts from publishers in order to compete on price.⁶⁸

The end of the NBA also allowed supermarkets to enter bookselling in a serious way. Books were attractive for the supermarkets because they were seen as aspirational and educational items. Unlike traditional bricks and mortar booksellers who are ostensibly inhibited by their persona of cultural mediator, supermarkets have the freedom to take a revolutionarily clear-cut economic approach to selling books. Once the NBA had fallen supermarkets were able to negotiate using their economic power favourable terms with publishers on titles that were likely to become bestsellers. For example, the UK supermarket chain Asda would buy pallets of books that they would strategically place in the middle of the shop floor and consistently sell at a discounted rate. This practice meant that supermarkets total sales doubled from 12% in 2000 to 25% in 2006. During this time independents share of total sales fell by 5% and the combination of Ottakar's and Waterstones total sales decreased from 28% to 23%.⁶⁹ These figures demonstrate that despite the chains initial success in the free market the majority of the implications for traditional retailers operating without the NBA emerged after 1998.

⁶⁶ S. Jordison, 'Time to Bring Back the Net Book Agreement', *The Guardian*, 17 June 2010 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2010/jun/17/net-book-agreement-publishing>> (28 May 2014).

⁶⁷ L. Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists: Bookselling and the Culture of Consumption* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16.

⁶⁸ In selling their businesses smaller chains were able to capitalise on their symbolic capital and consolidate their assets before being forced out of the market.

⁶⁹ Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 57.

The decline in independents sales was predicted by supporters of the NBA. The eventual loss of independent bookshops from poor sales generally implies a streamlining of the industry as a result of the NBA's termination. In an article regarding the importance of the consumer to market share Laing and Royle attribute the supermarkets dominance to both a loss of sales from traditional retailers but also an increase in new readers.⁷⁰ Some senior retailers accused publishers of naiveté, and of managing the market poorly. It was voiced that publisher's had foolishly assumed that chains would always be strong and thus wrongly gave too much discount and too much product to the supermarkets. The case of the supermarkets demonstrates how retailers can shape consumer demand, but also indicates the publisher's role in influencing supply. The ubiquity of cheap books for sale created price-sensitive consumers which pushed the chain stores into direct competition with non traditional retailers. This indicates that social and economic pressures influence how booksellers act and the market with which they act in.

American firms also became more invested in the UK market after the termination of the NBA. Without RPM the English language based UK market became a more viable option for American firms seeking to export their big superstore, discounted and generic model. The Michigan based superstore book company, Borders expanded internationally to the UK in 1998, and set up large bookstores with collaborations with the American coffee shop company, Starbucks.⁷¹ The introduction of the superstore brought further competition to the UK market and increased the likelihood of discounting that occurs in industries where competition for sales is intense. The large warehouses of books characteristic of Borders undermined the bricks and mortar stores value propositions of extensive choice and contributed to a period of first confusion and then adaptation within the book retail sector. In light of 2012 being the seventh consecutive year that a significant number of independent booksellers have closed Tim Godfray, chief executive of the Booksellers Association (BA) commented on how the balance of risk and power within the book trade fundamentally shifted in 1997 and now sits disproportionately with the traditional bookseller.⁷² His comment reveals that the far reaching impacts of the NBA's collapse made the traditional bookseller position in the marketplace inherently weaker.

The advent of the online retailer due to the growth of digital alongside the demise of the NBA are two highly influential and connected events which changed UK bookselling practices. The central player in the online retail market was Amazon.com, the brainchild of Princeton

⁷⁰ A. Laing & J. Royle, 'Extend the Market or Maintain the Loyal Customer? The Dilemma Facing Today's Booksellers', *Publishing Research Quarterly*, (2005), 26.

⁷¹ Borders also purchased the bookshop company, Books Etc. who also had a natural affinity with discounting and expensive front of store displays.

⁷² A. Flood, 'Decline in Independent Bookshops Continues with 73 Closures in 2012', *The Guardian*, 22 February 2013 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2013/feb/22/Independent-Bookshops-73-closures-2012>> (6 July 2014).

computer science graduate, Jeff Bezos. An American company Amazon opened for business in the newly free market of the UK in 1998. The site understood the importance and commercial value of tailor made customer recommendations based on previous purchases and appropriately marked up metadata. Its early research indicated that consumers wanted selection, convenience and price and in 2002 the site continued to extend and mechanise its services when it introduced Amabot, a recommendations algorithm designed to replace editorialised content. The great advantage of online retailers over stores such as Waterstones is that they are able to offer a huge array of titles without paying rent for large centrally located premises. Amazon's algorithms offer the illusion of curation but the warehouse style is generally conducive to offering a wide selection of titles and selling books at a low price.

Amazon is also particularly successful at presenting back list titles which were previously the independents and Waterstones' niche. In his seminal work, *The Long Tail* (2008) Christopher Anderson offers the perspective that the age of mass culture and big hits which began after the post-war period is beginning to flounder. Hits are not the economic force that they once were and the main effect of all this connectivity is unfiltered access from the mainstream to the 'farthest fringe of the underground.'⁷³ Anderson's comments demonstrate that Amazon could provide for many tastes while traditional booksellers did not have the space or the means to present themselves as catering for the diverse reader. Industry insider Tom Holman described the poor results from traditional retailers in a September 2003 *Book Marketing Limited's* fortnightly review as an indication that fierce competition on price strengthened direct channels at the expense of traditional outlets.⁷⁴ From 2000 to 2006 online retailer's total sales increased from 2% to 7%.⁷⁵ The scale of online retailers means that they can sell bestsellers cheap and offer niche titles to a wide range of customers.

Miller astutely describes the wider dilemmas of online bookselling in that they established shopping as onerous and further altered a consumer's perception of scarcity which deepened the discount culture.⁷⁶ In a study on the impact of the online retailer on bookselling, Davies *et al.* argue that the lower penetration of online retailers in Germany (6.9% of the German language market in 2005) is due to that the inability to 'price freely'.⁷⁷ This implies that the lack of RPM in the UK meant that online retailers had a deeper and quicker impact on book buying cultures than in more regulated markets. In 2009 former MD of Waterstones Tim Coates explained that the threat from online retailing caused Waterstones to lose its way as a cultural

⁷³ C. Anderson, *The Long Tail: Why the Future of Business is Selling Less of More* (New York: Hyperion, 2008), 17.

⁷⁴ T. Holman, 'Direct Channels Outpacing Shops', *The Bookseller*, 4 November 2003, 6.

⁷⁵ Thompson, *Merchants of Culture*, 58.

⁷⁶ L. Miller, 'Perpetual Turmoil: Book Retailing in the Twenty-First Century United States', *Logos*, 22 (2011), 16-25.

⁷⁷ Fishwick, 'Book Prices in the UK since the End of Resale Price Management', 369.

institution.⁷⁸ Amazon undercut Waterstones' unique selling point which at the time was offering a wide variety of titles. In response Waterstones attempted to compete on price rather than selection.

It should also be acknowledged that the benefits of digital did not just favour the online retailer. The improvement of search engines in 1995 also enhanced the experience of service desks and staff knowledge in bricks and mortar shops. In the early 2000s several bookshops built up a strong customer order business which was greatly aided by an effective wholesaling system and software such as the 2000 Vistas PubEasy system which checked availability and ordered stock over the Internet. The introduction of EPOS in the 1990s allowed booksellers to record data on every sale made. It has strongly influenced the way that booksellers manage their business but also means that buying decisions are primarily dictated by sales data.⁷⁹ This further detracted from the book being perceived as a cultural artefact and legitimised the free market mentality inherent in practices from 1997 onwards.

The functionalities of new software modernised bookselling and re-established some of the power lost after the NBA. Beyond payroll and inventory management a broad range of independent and chain bookstores utilise the power of digital to enhance their business profile via store websites, social media, and e-mail newsletters. The academic Oren Teicher discusses how digital has altered the mentality of independent booksellers. He compares the discussion in 2013 about making the websites of independents better and more interactive with the debate in 2003 on the relative usefulness of a website to a bookstore.⁸⁰ Generally, the digital question and the online retailer have contributed to the current state of uncertainty and flux within the industry, but it has also pushed traditional retailers to be both more responsive and facilitated the diversification of business models. Teicher's argument highlights how increased competition and the changing demands of the consumer have made the booksellers better at enhancing their profile.

Despite any admirable attempt to acquire new readers, bricks and mortar retailers have to now work harder to create the consumers to begin with. The growing prevalence of the Internet, like the introduction of radio and television before it further undermines the sales of the physical book by narrowing the field of those that perceive reading as an interesting way to spend leisure time. The year 2007 reflects this trend and signifies an *annus horribilis* for chain stores in the UK. In 2007 Borders, which by then comprised of 42 superstores was sold to the

⁷⁸ S. Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling', *The Guardian*, 10 November 2009 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/nov/10/waterstones-high-street-Bookselling>> (14 July 2014).

⁷⁹ Examples of digital improving stock management is software such as Treeline Analytics, an online collaborative tool focused around inventory management for independent booksellers, and Edelweiss, a Business to Business hub and customer retail management tool for booksellers and publishers.

⁸⁰ O. Teicher, 'Booksellers and Change', *Publisher's Research Quarterly*, 29 (2013), 129.

private equity group Risk Capital Partners for the modest sum of £10million. Waterstones also announced that it was consolidating some assets by reducing its number of shop locations by 96 premises, which it later transpired symbolically included its Oxford Street flagship. In July 2009 Borders was bought out by its management but went into administration in November and all 45 borders stores in the UK were closed on 22 December 2009. The closing of Borders represents a vast decline in dedicated shelf space and implies that the business model of bricks and mortar shops competing on price was not sustainable against agents who could sell books as loss leaders.

Traditional bookselling practices have been further undermined by the introduction of the e-reader to the UK market. Although present in some form throughout the late twentieth century their ubiquity was cemented when Amazon introduced the Kindle e-reader to the UK in 2008. The Kindle is a functional and portable device with an easy and affordable purchasing model which essentially bypasses the need for a bricks and mortar stores. Despite any restructuring within the traditional trade, the new challenge of e-books and the growing domination and ingrained attitudes regarding online retailing amounted to a bleak atmosphere for the physical bookshop in 2008. Large retailers have used their sway to at least establish themselves. Laing and Royle place the independent retailer as at the most risk from the e-book market and in 2010 two independents closed every week which they say suggests how much of the market share is now lost to direct channels.⁸¹ The publisher Peter Donoughue argues that unless independents have the stock, capital and power to provide interesting titles, layout their stores and organise author events their role will be in serious jeopardy.⁸² This is an interesting perspective as Donoughue appears to imply that the way to fight against the hegemony of digital is not with scale but by curating your service and capitalising on the symbolism of the book.

The 2011 sale of Waterstones for £53 million to the Russian billionaire and publisher Alexander Mamut marks a turning point for the company and UK bookselling. It is significant that Waterstones was sold to a private buyer rather than an equity firm who would have been likely to appoint a safer choice for a manager. The hiring of James Daunt, the success story behind the small franchise of bookshops, Daunt Books marks a new emphasis of individualism within the company. In a 2011 *Observer* interview Daunt references the UK artisanal chain food store Waitrose as an inspiration for the future of the bookshop.⁸³ He is referring to the belief that although rival supermarket Morrisons is cheaper, shoppers will continue to shop in

⁸¹ A. Laing & J. Royle, 'Bookselling Online: An Examination of Consumer Behaviour Patterns', *Publishers Research Quarterly*, 29 (2013), 110-127.

⁸² P. Donoughue, 'Beyond the Fear of Cannibalisation: Will the Book Publishing Industry Survive the Digital Revolution', *Logos*, 21 (2010), 167-178.

⁸³ K. Kellaway, 'James Daunt: 'I don't recognise that books are dead'', *The Observer*, 3 June 2011 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jun/03/james-daunt-waterstones-interview>> (16 June 2014).

Waitrose because price is currently not the only consideration. It implies that the UK's largest chain, and thus a significant player in the book trade field are strategically readdressing their value proposition. This suggests that the ebb and flow of a traditional bookseller's power is dependent upon societal expectations. Whereas in the 1990s and early 2000s price was the main consideration the focus has since shifted to providing experiences.

Although the bookselling industry in 2013 remains precarious there was a renewal of optimism for the sector. Liz Thompson believes that the e-book market in the UK has reached a plateau, if so this marks a brief interlude of respite for the traditional bookselling community.⁸⁴ For example, in 2013 Waterstones had 286 stores, but there was also a concerted effort to refit 80 of them by year's end. Children's bookshops were particularly singled out in 2013 as an example of success in difficult times. There were no reported closures in 2012 and the opening of two new shops, Brentwood's 'Chicken and Frog' and Crouch End's 'Pickled Pepper' are both described as 'breathing new life into their high streets'.⁸⁵ There are also individuals who believe digital supports physical. At a 2012 conference a number of independents noted times when Kindle users had said they had read a particular title as an e-book and now wanted to give a physical copy as a present.⁸⁶ This may not be enough to compensate for the sales lost to digital, but does re-emphasise the gifting advantage that physical books have over e-books.

To understand the legacy of the NBA's collapse it is beneficial to utilise the categories of external pressures defined by Darnton. External pressures such as the economic power and influence of American superstores, supermarkets and online retailers can all be traced back to abolition of the NBA. The recent ubiquity of digital sales and online retailing initially established the UK market as a competitive field where the book is a commodity but recent social change has prompted a revival in expecting an experience when purchasing in physical shops. To remain relevant chains have pragmatically begun to emulate independent practices by advocating their status as a cultural mediator dealing with symbolic goods. The introduction of the chains to this new role puts further pressure on those agents who have always been connected to their local community and culture. Essentially, the loss of a legal sanction has had far reaching, direct and indirect impacts and although many of these eventualities have occurred in countries with RPM it is the depth of the effect that any new agents or processes have had on the UK market since 1997 that is striking.

⁸⁴ Thompson, 'UK Bookselling Adjusting to the New Normal', 5-6.

⁸⁵ Flood, 'Decline in Independent Bookshops Continues with 73 Closures in 2012'.

⁸⁶ R. Tagholm, 'The Digital Ups and Downs of UK Independent Bookselling', *Publishing Perspectives*, 20 September 2012 <<http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/09/the-digital-ups-and-downs-of-uk-independent-bookselling/>> (22 May 2014).

Chapter Three: From Standardised to Customised

*'Bookshops are evolving into something that goes beyond books and that's quite exciting.'*⁸⁷

James Daunt

This chapter presents the observation that since the collapse of the NBA both independent and chain bookshops have slowly established themselves as local and cultural agents. In an attempt to compete against external parties whose strength in the UK derives from a lack of RPM bookshops have redefined their role. Bourdieu's hypothesis regarding the legitimising power of symbolic capital is an invaluable resource for understanding the phenomenon of the local and cultural movement. His theories on the cultural field being an economic world in reverse where commercial success may undermine an agent's brand is important to understanding the reasoning behind the local and cultural movement.⁸⁸ Donoghue's musing on how bookshops will survive in the future adds depth to the argument by stating that consumer loyalty can be pursued in numerous ways outside of price and can be established by curating services and providing literary experiences.⁸⁹ The chapter will cover the period from 1997 to present day to show how bookshops have adjusted in response to competition and gradually implemented local and cultural practices.

Fishwick's report into the effects of the abandonment of the Agreement did predict that the loss of RPM would push independents to compete via improved services, but it is limited in the sense that it only anticipated enhanced book buying and customer ordering functionalities, and did not extend to any assertions regarding the chain shops.⁹⁰ In the years following the NBA's downfall there was a general gap between expectation and reality, especially when the trade did not do as poorly as was anticipated by NBA supporters. This generally contributed to the slow adoption of practices outside of direct competition. A *Bookseller* article in 1995 reported initial sales success, where even those retailers who had not engaged in discounting appeared to benefit from a renewed interest in books among the public, and quotes a 1995 BA report that stated that 'trade had been quite impressive'.⁹¹ By 1998 it was being discussed that the NBA had affected paperback prices and generally there is a dawning realisation that the whole calculation of bookselling without the NBA is contingent upon sales.⁹² Essentially,

⁸⁷ C. William, 'Independents Sign Up For A Digital Christmas,' *The Bookseller*, 16 November 2013, 7.

⁸⁸ Bourdieu, *Field of Cultural Production*, 10.

⁸⁹ Donoghue, 'Beyond the Fear of Cannibalisation', 175.

⁹⁰ Fishwick & Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement*, 89.

⁹¹ 'Sales records broken as fears grow over 'wild discounts'', *The Bookseller*, 13 November 1995, 6.

⁹² 'Fall of the NBA Hits Paperbacks', *The Bookseller*, 8 May 1998, 5.

booksellers needed to sell a lot more to make any investment back on their high volume purchases.

During an email correspondence with the owner of the popular and independent 'City Books' bookshop in Brighton Paul Sweetman aptly explains the situation for independents since 1997. He described the loss of the NBA as a 'double edged sword, we [independents] have lost much of our competition, but have to work harder and do things that the Internet cannot.'⁹³ Independent bookshops in the UK have generally declined in number since 1997, but those that remain are leaner, more astute and better sales people than before. By retaining their position as a cultural agent and customising their services by offering book based experiences they have demonstrated an understanding of consumer demands regarding shopping atmospheres and matured into the role of local and cultural agent. In an article on the impact of digital on bookshops the bookseller Roger Tagholm supports the observation when he states that UK independents are now run by young, web-savvy exiles from Waterstones who know what they are talking about.⁹⁴ Conversely, due to the initial period of direct competition against non traditional retailers the chains path to the local and cultural agent has been more chaotic.

In 2009 while writing about the poor bookselling practices of Waterstones journalist Stuart Jeffries astutely described the main issues resulting from the deconstructing of the NBA. He explains that in response to increased competition big retail business will inevitably move to the lowest common denominator, where any position such as a commitment to book quality has to wane.⁹⁵ Independent bookseller Tim O'Kelly of 'One Tree Books' scathingly describes the dangers of a lowest common denominator policy, 'if you end up like Waterstones was a couple of years ago selling Mars bars, you totally lose focus.'⁹⁶ This comment indicates the continued significance of the book as a cultural artefact to be revered by booksellers. It implies that maintaining a degree of deference to the book amounts to a more focussed business and enamours more respect from the wider bookselling community. However, in the initial period following the NBA's abolition the chain stores largely compromised their status as a cultural institution, and the capital that such an image affords for economies of scale, higher margins and better discounts. This was initially successful and contributed to a period of expansion for the chain bookshops.

From 1995-1997 the BA announced 239 withdrawals and 139 membership enrolments. Independents made up many of the withdrawals while new branches of chains that were

⁹³ Email from Paul Sweetman to author, (6 May 2014).

⁹⁴ R. Tagholm, 'The Digital Ups and Downs of UK Independent Bookselling', *Publishing Perspectives*, 20 September 2012 <<http://publishingperspectives.com/2012/09/the-digital-ups-and-downs-of-uk-independent-bookselling/>>(22 May 2014).

⁹⁵ Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling'.

⁹⁶ S. Moss, 'A Day in the Life of an Independent Bookshop', *The Guardian*, 1 October 2011 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/oct/01/day-in-life-independent-bookshop>>(18 June 2014).

rapidly expanding account for the vast proportion of enrolments. A survey by the BA indicated that half of those withdrawing were influenced by the abandonment of the NBA.⁹⁷ To understand the reasoning behind such a shift in bookselling practice one can take inspiration from the discussion on the publishing industry. In his partisan but useful account of the corporatisation of the publishing sector, expert Anthony Schiffrin discusses the tendency of publishers to merge in order to reach the consumer faster and benefit from economies of scale.⁹⁸ The chain bookshops' initial response to a free market and the introduction of new competitors was to focus on economic capital via policies of standardisation. The tangible benefits from economies of scale such as better terms of discounting, the reduction of overheads via the consolidation of the back office and sales forces became inherent in the practices of UK chains after the fall of the NBA.

The general understanding is that once companies expand they acquire management with little sensitivity to the product. Miller describes the period of standardisation as a rationalisation of business practices where the focus becomes short term attainment and the efficient selling of a product.⁹⁹ An example of standardisation due to the climate of mergers and acquisitions that intensified after the NBA is the absorption of Waterstones into the HMV group. The management at HMV opted to apply to Waterstones some of the retailing principles that had worked so well for their music stores. This included a greater emphasis on campaigns and front of store promotions, higher stock turnover and reducing the range of inventory. In 1999 the recently appointed MD of Waterstones David Kneale responded to company inefficiency by introducing a cost saving centralised book buying system which emulated supermarket protocol of providing a small selection with great emphasis on bestsellers. The publisher Joel Ricketts describes Kneale's revamp in 1999 as a poor time for Waterstones to have a crisis of identity and refers to the threat of the online retailer and new competition as both a catalyst and a repercussion of the 'recent changes'.¹⁰⁰ These occurrences all feature in the supporters of NBA's predictions for the future of bookselling in a free market and Ricketts' statement highlights the wider impact of the loss of RPM on the identity of a bookseller.

Standardisation practices reached a zenith in 2009 when Waterstones introduced a cost cutting central distribution warehouse in Burton-on-Trent called the Hub. Former editor of the *Bookseller*, Nelly Denny describes the Hub's original purpose to be the provision of, 'shelf-ready parcels of books to each store, removing the need for much of the unpacking and in store

⁹⁷ Fishwick & Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement*, 8.

⁹⁸ A. Schiffrin, *The Business of Books: How International Conglomerates Took Over Publishing and Changed the Way We Read* (London: Verso, 2001), 6.

⁹⁹ Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists*, 13.

¹⁰⁰ J. Ricketts, 'The Swan Song of Waterstone's: Commercial Pressures Risk Ruining the Book Lover's Favourite Chain', *New Statesman* 17 July 2000 <<http://www.newstatesman.com/node/138161>> (8 May 2014).

administration.¹⁰¹ For the general secretary of the Society for Authors, Mark Le Fanu the Hub confirmed Waterstones mentality of selling products not books.¹⁰² Le Fanu is a clear representative of a view that prioritises authors but is also a compelling authority on the issues surrounding the wider impact of centralisation, and the Hub was generally indicative of the homogenised style of Waterstones. His comment reveals that even in 2009 any endeavour by Waterstones to identify as literary and customised was hindered by its centralised system of distribution. Essentially, standardised businesses focus on short term fast selling items and have little concern for long term gain. American bookseller, William Kramer perceptively wrote in 1996 that the policies of standardisation undermine the backlist and encourage price cutting.¹⁰³

An extension of standardisation practices was the chain shops introduction of homogenised, branded spaces similar in style to the US superstore. Consumers were able to enter any branch of a homogenised bookshop confidently knowing that they would be able to locate certain items easily and without intervention or assistance from staff. The flaws of Fishwick's report are visible when he stated that there is no worth in the hypothesis that the availability of titles in non traditional retailers enticed lower income families to purchase books.¹⁰⁴ In 2005 former chief of Waterstones Alan Giles justified the stores policy of homogenisation by stating that the uniform style democratised the bookshop, making it less 'intellectually intimidating'.¹⁰⁵ Giles' comment reflects a wider debate surrounding bookselling that is addressed particularly concisely by Miller. She believes that the entrance of the supermarkets and their unintimidating atmosphere was integral to the emergence of a new book buying market.¹⁰⁶ In order to pursue the new market that purchased books while food shopping the chains rebranded themselves as uniform spaces which sold books at competitive prices. It implies that in the early 2000s consumers sought something different from their book buying experience than they currently do in 2014.

A report considering the repercussions of the NBA highlighted that of 489 book buyers in social classes A,B and C1, 26% bought a discounted book whereas of 302 individuals in classes C2, D and E bought 38% books at discounted prices.¹⁰⁷ The report indicates that discounted books were primarily purchased by individuals from lower socio-economic groups. As most discounted books are purchased from supermarkets and online retailers the assumption that new agents after 1997 encouraged new readers does not seem implausible.

¹⁰¹ Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling'.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ W. Kramer, 'Independent Bookselling: A Frontline Dispatch', *Logos*, 7 (1996), 32-38.

¹⁰⁴ Fishwick & Fitzsimons, *Report into the Effects of the Abandonment of the Net Book Agreement*, 68.

¹⁰⁵ A. Laing & J. Royle, 'Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour' in B. Cope, A. Phillips (eds.), *The Future of the Book in the Digital Age* (Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2005), 115.

¹⁰⁶ Miller, 'Shopping for Community', 393.

¹⁰⁷ 'NBA or Not- It Makes no Difference', *The Bookseller*, 17 January 1996.

The adoption of homogenisation as a bookselling practice, which to some may appear bland indicates another way that the chains attempted to compete for sales. Their effort to challenge new agents via standardisation and homogenisation removed them from their original value proposition of offering choice and quality, and further separated them from being in direct competition with the independent bookseller.

Since 1998 discounts have become not only deeper but also more extensive. Fishwick attributes this to the increased range on offer by supermarkets and the discounting of titles by online retailers such as Amazon.¹⁰⁸ Before the end of the NBA supermarkets sold very few books and although low prices may not be their only competitive advantage (the 'onestop shop' is also a factor), the emphasis given to discounts was perceived as important to the consumer. Problematically, a small retailer lacking the bargaining power to obtain a discount much above 40% could not acquire the book at a price less than a supermarket sold at retail. This highlights the growing division between chain and independent in terms of competition and elucidates on why so many independent bookshops closed between the years of 1997 and 2004.¹⁰⁹ Thompson suggests that the ubiquity of discounting altered the public perception of the value of books and it became an expectation that books would be discounted.¹¹⁰ This mentality reflects the post NBA realisation that bookshops success was dictated by sales and price.

A reflection of the intrinsic state of discounting in Britain was the release of J.K Rowling's seventh novel, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* in July 2007. It has been selected to demonstrate the extent to which booksellers would discount for the sake of dominance and customer loyalty. The book was expected to cost £17.99 at full price yet pre-orders were offered by Amazon at a 50% discount making it a loss leader. Waterstones also discounted the book to half price which the company justified as a means to dissuade the consumer from thinking that the brand is expensive. This is a position in stark contrast with the company's current claim that price is not the only consideration when purchasing books. Owner of the independent 'Children's Bookshop' in North London, Lesley Agnew describes the difficulty of competing with the chains who get a large discount from the publishers, 'we will open at midnight, and by 2am we will have mostly done all our *Harry Potter* sales.'¹¹¹ Her comment indicates that in 2007 some independent retailers still felt compelled to defend themselves on similar terms against the chains and external parties. Although generally independents sought to compete on new terms for the *Harry Potter* market Agnew's methods are indicative of the hypothesis that the independents matured into the role of local and cultural agent. The definition of local and

¹⁰⁸Fishwick, 'Book Prices in the UK Since the End of Resale Price Management', 368-369.

¹⁰⁹ 2004 is described as a cut off point because this is when publisher's title output began to decline.

¹¹⁰ Thomson, *Merchants of Culture*, 310

¹¹¹ M. Pauli, 'Independent Plan to Grab Share of Potter market', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2007

<<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/mar/01/harrypotter.bestBookshops>> (8 May 2014).

cultural emerged organically and the speed that it was adopted naturally depended on a complex dynamic of intellectual, human, symbolic and economic capital. Without forward thinking employees and the finances to fund a long term, low reward endeavour an independent bookshops evolution into this role would have emerged slower.

There are two main reasons why the standardised and discounted mass selling approach of the traditional retailers has not prevailed. Essentially, it was not sustainable and the consumer, due to a complex array of social and economic factors evolved and began to seek new services from their shopping experiences. Digital commentator Christopher Anderson believes that growing affluence and increased choice brought on by the Internet means that individuals have shifted from bargain shoppers to mini-connoisseurs who demand choice and experience.¹¹² The advent of online selling and the contraction of the book trade (from 2004 there were a reduced number of titles) forced booksellers to look beyond the book to ensure that their experience was thought of as valuable. In 2005 Royle and Laing astutely conclude that in order to survive retailers are destined to be social enablers who facilitate aspirations, benefits, pleasures and new emotions into their business practices.¹¹³

An example of the move to present the bookshop as a social space and which transcends the chain, independent divide is the coffee shop. From 2004 two of the main chains in the UK, Borders and Waterstones both had large coffee companies as concessions in their stores.¹¹⁴ Independent bookseller Stephen Moss described the value of the coffee shop to the user experience as creating, 'an ambience. There's a bit of noise, a bit of buzz and clatter.'¹¹⁵ Former CEO of HMV Alan Giles emphasises the added value of a bookshop coffee area as a way to reclaim the 'discerning reader' from the convenience and low price of books bought online.¹¹⁶ In her 2008 study which was written prior to the consolidation of Borders, Laing describes the coffee shop as indicative of the bookshop attempting to be a more social and enticing space.¹¹⁷ This also indicates that after a period of confusion where the chains standardised and competed on price that there was a realisation that added experience should be offered to entice consumers back to the bricks and mortar store. The renewed attempt to reengage with the literary clientele signifies an ostensible return to the more traditional structures of bookselling

¹¹² Anderson, *The Long Tail*, 34.

¹¹³ Laing and Royle, 'Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour', 123.

¹¹⁴ Borders was affiliated with Starbucks and Waterstones was connected to Costa Coffee.

¹¹⁵ Moss, 'A Day in the Life of an Independent Bookshop'.

¹¹⁶ A. Giles, 'Café Conundrum', *The Bookseller*, 28 January 2011, 11.

¹¹⁷ A. Laing, *Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour: Marketing Strategies and Responses in Traditional and Online Environments*, Robert Gordon University (2008), Unpublished PhD Thesis, 385.

whereby chains and independents are in direct competition due to offering similar value propositions.¹¹⁸

The bookshop coffee area is inextricably linked to the bookstore presenting itself as a 'third place'. The 'third place' is an extension of the 'first' and 'second' places of home and work and represents a space which encourages the opportunity to relax and socialise with likeminded individuals. This also reflects the discussion posed by UK sociologist David Wright who relays the conclusions made in Robert Putnam's seminal study on the disconnected lives of American society titled *Bowling Alone* (2000) to strengthen his theories.¹¹⁹ Wright applies Putnam's theories to the UK and explains that in response to the fragmented nature of modern living brought on by the Internet people are looking outside of their neighbours and places of work for companionship, and that this is something that the bookshop is capitalising on.¹²⁰ This is not surprising considering the dominance of non traditional booksellers. Laing and Royle also believe that the motivation behind presenting the bookshop as a 'third place' is as an endeavour to expand customer bases by providing a 'safe and friendly harbour in an increasingly impersonal world.'¹²¹ One of the repercussions of the free market is that booksellers become more receptive to changes in consumer demand. This also occurred in the free market of the eighteenth century when booksellers desperately diversified their practices and followed their clients to the suburbs of London.

According to the academics Oldenburg and Brissett for a space to truly be considered a 'third place' conversation or communication must take place freely, democratically and without censure.¹²² In 2013 Laing and Royle realise that their past research on the issue in 2005 which easily referred to bookshops as a 'third place' is misleading.¹²³ While consumers in the bookshop environment often experience elements of the 'third place' it should be acknowledged that conversation rarely takes place without the combined effect of bookshop and coffee area.¹²⁴ Arguably, the recent growth of a local and cultural movement where bookshops present interesting book based experiences such as author evenings and discussions goes beyond the coffee shop to better reflect Oldenburg and Brissett's influential definition. Customers are encouraged to debate, discuss and socialise within the physical space of the bookshop without

¹¹⁸ The year 2004 only represents an ostensible return as chain shops still continued to pursue standardisation and homogenisation practices until 2011.

¹¹⁹ 'Bowling Alone' refers to the reduction in all the forms of in-person social intercourse upon which Americans used to find, educate, and enrich the fabric of their social lives. He believes this undermines the active civil engagement which a strong democracy requires from its citizens.

¹²⁰ D. Wright, *Work, Consumption and the Self in the UK Retail Book trade*, University of Nottingham (1999), Unpublished PhD Thesis, 146.

¹²¹ Laing and Royle, 'Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour', 128.

¹²² Oldenburg & Brissett, "The Third Place", 266.

¹²³ Laing and Royle, 'Bookselling Culture and Consumer Behaviour', 129.

¹²⁴ Laing & Royle, 'Examining Chain Bookshops in the Context of "Third Place"', 2.

the commerciality of the tills detracting from the experience. The realisation that the 'third place' is a valuable commodity in modern day society is not confined to bookselling. In 2009 Starbucks also launched its first locally relevant coffee shop in Conduit Street, London.¹²⁵ For economic and social reasons bookshops are focussing on their local communities and redefining their role where the services on offer are encroaching upon other agents within the book trade field.

An early example of a chain bookshop promoting itself as a local and cultural agent within the realms of the 'third place' was James Heneage's franchise of bookshops, Ottakar's. Positioned as the antithesis to Waterstones homogenised style, Ottakar's shops took inspiration from *The Adventures of Tintin* book *King Ottokar's Sceptre* (1939). Established in 1987 the brand expanded rapidly and by mid 2006 the company had shops in 141 locations throughout the UK.¹²⁶ Despite its fast growth the franchised nature of the company meant it could retain symbolic capital through its more customised experience. Each store had a committed and educated staff, advertisements for reading and writing groups and author visits. Customer's poetry and illustrations adorned the walls which helped present the bookshop as a collaborative and inspiring space. Kevin Harris, head of Human Resources at Ottakar's describes how the company focussed on a very high level of knowledge where the person behind the counter is as much part of the brand and ambience.¹²⁷

Wright also borrows from Bourdieu's thinking on capital to describe how the knowledge and enthusiasm of bookshop workers has become a cultural means of gaining competitive advantage within the trade.¹²⁸ Ottakar's demand for knowledgeable staff and its personalised image was central to presenting the shop as meaningful space and was the diametric opposite of Waterstones' persona at the time. However, in 2005 the HMV group publicised its intention to buyout the Ottakar's franchise. The case was referred to the OFT and was then sent to the Competition Commission in 2006. A main consideration against the buyout by Waterstones was the two businesses divergent purchasing paths, one was highly centralised while Ottakar's focussed on a commercial understanding of the local market. Despite this Ottakar's was purchased in 2006 and was merged under the Waterstones brand. This event signifies that the

¹²⁵ Rather than a traditional identikit Starbucks it was designed to mimic its more stylish surroundings. In some of Starbucks' recently remodelled coffee shops the company has commissioned local artists to craft bespoke pieces.

¹²⁶ It made a number of acquisitions including small bookstores in the West Country, eight branches of James Thin Booksellers in 2002, and in April 2003 twenty-four branches of Hammicks Bookshops Ltd, a company with 35 years of bookselling history.

¹²⁷ Laing & Royle, 'Extend the Market or Maintain the Loyal Customer?', 28.

¹²⁸ D. Wright, 'Mediating Production and Consumption: Cultural Capital and 'Cultural Workers'', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 1 (2005), 105- 121.

business practices of Ottakar's were deemed both successful and threatening enough to entice the HMV group to invest.

In comparison, the independents local and cultural persona developed more organically throughout the mid 2000s. Having been streamlined after the NBA it is likely that those independents that remained were more astute regarding shifts in consumer demand. Owner of independent 'Dulwich Books' Shelia O'Reilly reflects on the independents bookseller's mentality regarding best bookselling practice, 'we must offer more than the chains and supermarkets.'¹²⁹ Her comment signifies that independents were aware that they could utilise their unique distinctive spaces as a means to compete against the tedium of standardisation. A 2008 report by Fishwick describes how since 2004 the smaller bookshops grouped under 'other specialist bookshops' have lost less of the market share than initially occurred after the Agreement's termination.¹³⁰ One reason for this is that many have become niche outlets, no longer trying to compete on best-sellers. They are now focussing on personalised services and concentrating on minority interest titles. For example, in the week ending 22 December 2007 only nine of the 20 best-selling titles in independent bookshops were in the top 20 for the market as a whole. There is a distinct increase from 2007 of independents responding to the dominance of the discounting culture by customising and expanding on the traditional bookselling services. This implies a concerted and calculated shift based on the need to find a niche outside of cost.

The 2007 release of the guaranteed, but heavily discounted final instalment of the *Harry Potter* franchise represents a moment when independents generally began to diversify and improve their services. It was a title which uncharacteristically mobilised otherwise apathetic readers to engage with books and thus represented huge potential for booksellers to establish loyal customers. The potential for bricks and mortar stores to capitalise on the event was enhanced by the fact that the book was not released in e-book format. The *Guardian* newspaper placed 'Dulwich Books', an independent bookstore in South London at the vanguard of the battle for *Harry Potter* sales. The store endeavoured to garner support by offering wizard inspired activities and a *Harry Potter* based loyalty scheme which was described as a means of 'rewarding our loyal customers as well as promoting other children's books.'¹³¹ The 'Children's Bookshop' in North London also gave out vouchers giving *Harry Potter* customers 10% off their next purchase, the evening of the release was orchestrated to be about engaging children and building a rapport with a potentially huge customer base. These services indicate a tangible movement towards establishing a long term relationship with the consumer which was intended to build customer loyalty and reduce the risk of individuals purchasing from the

¹²⁹ Pauli, 'Independent Plan to Grab Share of Potter Market', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2007.

¹³⁰ Fishwick, 'Book Prices in the UK since the End of Resale Price Management', 363.

¹³¹ Pauli, 'Independent Plan to Grab Share of Potter Market', *The Guardian*, 1 March 2007.

supermarket. The emphasis on building a rapport with the consumer was just one of many ways in which bookshops have redefined their roles since the end of the NBA.

The initial success of the chain stores after 1997 forced independent booksellers into searching for a way to remain relevant. Miller astutely describes how independents sought to distinguish themselves from the chains by stressing their superior selection services otherwise represented by intellectual capital.¹³² Former lawyer Nic Bottomley's bookshop 'Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights' situated in Bath opened in 2006. It is a prime example of a bookshop promoting customised and curated selections intended to engage the literary or inquisitive consumer. The shop offers innovative services such as the 'Reading Spa' which focuses on providing a 'unique selling experience' from knowledgeable and passionate staff.¹³³ The emporium has also strengthened its brand with the introduction of the 'Reading Year', a service which involves the careful monthly selection and distribution of books to a paying subscriber. Bottomley describes the campaign as, 'creating a gift experience out of a service that we've become renowned for, we are commoditising our bookselling skills'.¹³⁴ This reflects the argument that since the demise of the NBA independents have become shrewde regarding commercial enterprise.

Teicher's 2013 study into online versus in store browsing concludes that the percentage of discovery is higher in store (20%) than online where the discovery percentage decreases to 7%.¹³⁵ This is because it is easier for consumers to simultaneously find a book in a shop than online. Online the information has to be first known before searching. The emphasis on discoverability services promoted by independent bookshops suggests an awareness of the increased likelihood of impulse purchases being made in store. This practice is a legitimate way to establish a niche within a competitive market. Bibliophiles and reading spas are described as practical ways to grow an invaluable knowledge base on your customer. It is a method that goes beyond the generic algorithms that Amazon can offer and reflects industry commentator Sam Robinson's prediction regarding the future of bookselling. He believes that the role of both the chain and independent bookseller is vital to the experience of purchasing and is becoming more about rapport with your consumer.¹³⁶

Wright explains that both chains and independents use handwritten recommendations from staff to establish a connection with buyers.¹³⁷ This also has a discernible impact on sales of

¹³² Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists*, 9.

¹³³ Mr B's Emporium, 'Reading Spa's and Gifts' <www.mrbsemporium.com> (11 July 2014)

¹³⁴ Email Correspondence with Nic Bottomley, Co-Owner of the Mr B's Emporium of Reading Delights, Bath, six messages exchanged between (24 April 2014) and (16 May 2014).

¹³⁵ Teicher, 'Booksellers and Change', 131.

¹³⁶ M. Robinson, 'A Premises Move is an Opportunity to Revolutionise the Bookselling Space', *The Bookseller*, 7 December 2012, 21.

¹³⁷ Wright, 'Mediating Production and Consumption', 115.

particular titles, especially those from the backlist. Independent booksellers such as owner of 'One Tree Books' bookshop Tim O'Kelly believes that this practice adds value to the bookshop experience. His bookseller's place notes in the books to which they are especially committed to.¹³⁸ This promotes a degree of customisation not apparent in supermarkets or online retailing and is symptomatic of the attempt to enhance discoverability and build a rapport with the consumer. Literary agents turned booksellers Sarah Lutyens and Felicity Rubinstein describe the current era as the 'golden age of independent retailing and attribute this change to disenchantment with the supermarket atmosphere of the chains.'¹³⁹ Lutyen and Rubinstein's comments alongside the theories of Wright, Putnam and Miller do lend towards a consensus that there is a growing disenchantment amongst the British consumer regarding book buying in homogenised and bland exteriors. The long term ramifications of external agents entering the market after 1997 and societal changes established by digital has prompted a second change where consumers demand more from their shopping experiences. This change in consumer demand indicates why the chains have slowly redefined themselves.

An extension on providing customised sales techniques is creating a unique experience where visitors can engage, enjoy and be challenged in a social environment indicative of the 'third place'. The increased competition attributed to the loss of any form of fixed price streamlined UK independent booksellers and those that remained are more astute regarding business. 'David's Bookshop' in Letchworth was awarded the Orion Marketing Campaign of the Year in 2006 for its clever utilisation of the national World Book Day event. The store presented itself as a centre for ideas and discussion, and informal debates were hosted in store on key topics such as: 'Books are not baked beans'. The owner, David Wallace describes his motivations as twofold, 'while one objective was to increase sales, this was also about greater customer awareness and interest in the long term.'¹⁴⁰ The recognition of Wallace's marketing campaign indicates the importance of capitalising and encouraging topical discussions which are integral to presenting the bookshop meaningful space. Wallace's practices also indicate a revival in the long term approach to bookselling where bookshops establish a loyal customer base based on something more important but less tangible than price. It also reflects one of the one of the less apocalyptic arguments posed at the time of the NBA's demise that the free market may open up avenues of enterprise for independent-minded booksellers.

In an article on the value of the French style tax breaks for independent businesses incumbent editor of the *Bookseller* Philip Jones wrote that rather than subsidise the industry

¹³⁸ Moss, 'A Day in the Life of an Independent Bookshop', 1 October 2011.

¹³⁹ Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling', 10 November 2009.

¹⁴⁰ 'The Orion Marketing Campaign of the Year: David's Bookshop', *The Bookseller*, 22 September 2006, 19.

bookshop owners and publishers need to make small bookshops unique places to visit.¹⁴¹ Since 2007 there has been a general and evolving mentality amongst traditional retailers that in order to maintain some form of market segment that physical bookshops need to be both cultural and inspiring destinations. For the independents the policy of unique cultural spaces emerged faster as without large centralised head offices they could react quicker to changes in consumer demand. Independents also importantly retained the intellectual and symbolic capital that derives from having a knowledgeable workforce and unique spaces.

Owner of the 'Book Barge' bookshop Sarah Henshaw described why she set up a bookshop on a floating barge, 'I hoped that by creating a unique retail space, customers would realise how independent bookshops can offer a far more pleasurable shopping.'¹⁴² This comment reflects the debate in UK bookselling that emerged after the arrival of financially driven agents to the field from 1997. It contributed to a feeling of division between how a bookshop is and what it should offer. The emphasis of independents providing more personable experiences reflects the broader argument regarding whether books are a special item to be revered or a commodity to be bought and sold in bulk. Henshaw's comments epitomise the general debate by independents that they are more sympathetic to the cultural status of the book. Having first pursued a path of the lowest common denominator there has also been a revival of this mentality for the chains as a means to respond to compete against the chains and responding to the growing hegemony of a more discerning consumer.¹⁴³

Bourdieu perceptively describes how large scale production or dissemination of items in the field of symbolic goods is predominantly concerned with economic capital or 'the bottom line'. This is a valuable way to understand the slower adoption of more cultural practices by the chains as the financial rewards are not so instant and thus harder to justify to board members. After 1997 the standardisation and conglomeration of the chains meant that they widened their target audience and more explicitly pursued profit. Bourdieu believes that agents who depend on the broadest possible audience are less likely to experiment but he also postulates that such entities will borrow from the restricted field of 'symbolic goods' in an attempt to renew themselves.¹⁴⁴ This offers a preliminary conclusion for why the chains were slower to adopt the persona of local and cultural. Having achieved initial success with their discounting, homogenisation and standardisation policies they were less inclined to invest in cultural

¹⁴¹ P. Jones, 'French-Style Tax Breaks Are Not the Way to Save the UK's Small Bookshops', *The Guardian*, 8 February 2012 <<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/feb/08/french-model-tax-breaks-bookshops>> (28 May 2014).

¹⁴² L. Rourke, 'A Bookshop Going Places', *The Guardian*, 13 July 2011 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jul/13/bookshop-book-barge>> (3 June 2014).

¹⁴³ It is interesting that in 2014 there has been a debate regarding the reduced profit of the supermarket chains especially Asda and Tesco as shoppers go elsewhere to purchase food and non food items.

¹⁴⁴ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 8.

services. However, a cultural industry without restriction is subject to intense price competition. The strength of the online retailer and supermarkets in the UK contributed to the realisation that such practices were not sustainable. Large bookshops such as Waterstones and Foyles have since renewed their status via promoting themselves as cultural destinations.

Bookseller Willie Anderson aptly conceptualises the general feeling that the NBA prompted a period of adjustment and readjustment for bookshops when he wrote in 2002 that the big family businesses such as Foyles reacted poorly to the loss of the NBA. He warned that by trying to compete with supermarkets and retailers on price, instead of remembering their local identity and their strong brand these bookshops lost their unique power within the market.¹⁴⁵ It is significant that he refers to power as it emphasises that there is commercial incentive in providing such unique spaces and experiences. By presenting themselves as dynamic cultural destinations bookshops project a strong and valuable image to a new audience of consumer. For example jazz evenings and readings by authors such as Martin Amis and Peter Carey in 2010 contributed to Foyles' first profit in a decade. The bookseller exceeded its internal budgets to post a small but significant pre-tax profit of £336,000, and like-for-like sales (a key industry measure) were up 9.7% in a book market in which sales were estimated to be down 5.6% during the period.¹⁴⁶ Foyles' chief executive Sam Husain attributed the success to a return to a 'proper' book retailing service.¹⁴⁷ Since 2010 Foyles has not directly competed with non traditional retailers but instead has focussed on turning the Charing Cross location into a destination store.

A varied and dynamic selection of events is integral to presenting the bookshop as a local and cultural agent. A reflection of this trend is encapsulated by the Oxford store, The 'Albion Beatnik' bookshop who famously composed a poster using the typography from the iconic cover of Beat poet Allen Ginsberg's poem *Howl* (1955), with the heading, 'This is a Bookshop- Cross-Roads of Civilisation.' It encapsulates the attempt by Foyles and independents to communicate the multifunctional role of the bookshop that goes beyond providing just a buying experience to becoming a legitimate space to socialise and learn. The store provides numerous services outside of a bookstore's traditional remit and the poster reinforces that there are few boundaries to what a book shop, as a 'cross-road of civilisation' should offer.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁵ W. Anderson, 'Independent Versus Corporate Bookselling: A British View'. *Logos*, 13 (2002), 145-150.

¹⁴⁶ Z. Wood, 'Foyles Bookseller Makes First Real Profit for a Decade', *The Guardian*, 23 September 2010 <<http://www.theguardian.com/business/2010/sep/23/retail-waterstones>> (14 July 2014).

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸ It's also home to small publishing presses such as 'And Other Stories', and magazines including *Ferment*, *Structo* and houses the Oxford University Poetry Society.

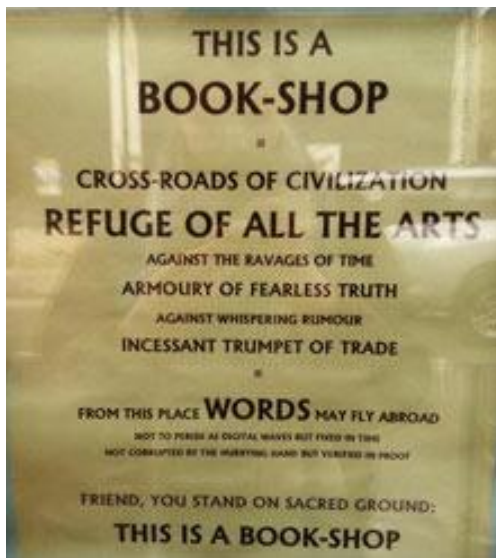


Figure 3: Poster celebrating the diversity of the Albion Beatnik Bookshop in Oxford.¹⁴⁹

Writing about the future of independent bookselling and successful bookshops Dan Holloway compellingly argues that the concept of crossroads ‘is the key to the Albion Beatnik’s success’, he describes the mentality that bookshops should be places to have cultural experiences as integral to the future survival of bookshops.¹⁵⁰ The store provides numerous services outside of a bookstore’s traditional remit and the poster reinforces that there are few boundaries to what a book shop, as a ‘cross-road of civilisation’ should offer.¹⁵¹ Holloway emphasises the necessity that bookshops provide personable and engaging events which go beyond generic book buying in order to respond to the convenience of shopping online. This suggests an evolution from the standardised and homogenous to seeing the value in cultural capital which highlights how the lines of competition have adjusted since the initial period of confusion after the NBA’s collapse.

It is evident that since the formal abolition of the NBA and the increased significance of buying volume in order to attain discounts that bookshops have endeavoured to find alternative ways to engage with consumers. This is apparent in the interesting trend in bookselling similar to the growth of live shows in the record industry of hosting literary festivals or street book fairs.¹⁵² Bookshop owner, Morag Watkins attributes the continued buoyancy of the ‘Chorleywood Bookshop’ to its involvement with literary events and festivals, ‘bookshops have

¹⁴⁹ D. Holloway, ‘The Albion Beatnik Bookshop: A Viral Success Worth Catching’, *The Guardian*, 13 May 2013 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2013/may/13/the-albion-beatnik-Bookshop>> (6 July 2014).

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ It’s also home to small publishing presses such as ‘And Other Stories’, and magazines including *Ferment*, *Structo* and houses the Oxford University Poetry Society.

¹⁵² A good example of a bookshop with an extensive list of events is the ‘Topping Company of Booksellers’. See, Topping Company of Booksellers, ‘Events’, <<http://www.toppingbooks.co.uk/events/>> (27 July 2014).

to get out into their communities and take books to the people.¹⁵³ Numerous literary festivals such as the iconic Hay on Wye and the Chalke Valley History Festival in Wiltshire are also sponsored by chain shops such as Waterstones.¹⁵⁴ At the events the store will have a 'pop-up shop' selling signed copies and the whole concept is invaluable to presenting the chain as a bastion of culture. Paul Sweetman of 'City Books' emphasises the value of such events since the NBA's formal end. In an email correspondence he describes how keeping a very large stock is rare and costs money, but that putting effort into organising author events and local festivals is 'time consuming, but popular'.¹⁵⁵ Sweetman's description indicates both the demand for such events but also highlights the tangible and positive impacts of being involved with the community.

The chain and independent bookstore have mostly pursued parallel paths, albeit at different paces but there is one fundamental feature of a chain which needed to be addressed in order to truly pursue the local and cultural line. That is the retraction of the standardised style which began in the 1990s and for Waterstones peaked in 2009 with the introduction of the Hub. Former MD of Waterstones Dominic Myers initiated the regeneration of the company in March 2011 and described the chain's previous mentality as one of 'stifling homogeneity'.¹⁵⁶ The appointment of the successful independent bookseller James Daunt in May 2011 signifies a concerted effort to renew Waterstones' image. Since this time Waterstones has promoted an aim to stock bookshops with between 50,000 and 150,000 titles which represents a significant departure from focussing on discounted bestsellers common in Waterstones practice from 1997 to 2011.¹⁵⁷

Waterstones have also courageously pursued a path of rapid decentralisation. The policy has been adopted to guarantee that each individual branch has a sense of identity and local relevance, and is a drastic departure from the policies of homogenisation that occurred up to 2010. The belief behind decentralisation is that most decisions cannot be taken from the centre and that they should be made by those who understand the situation and the consumer. The hallmark of the concept is facilitating a 'freedom to act', but there is also an element of response time to consumer demands and operating on optimum stock levels. Decentralisation is

¹⁵³ S. Butler, 'Independent Bookshops in Decline as Buying Habits Change', *The Guardian*, 21 February 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/feb/21/independent-bookshops-campaign>> (27 July 2014).

¹⁵⁴ Incidentally, the Chalke Valley History Festival was set up by Ottakar's founder James Heneage.

¹⁵⁵ Email Correspondence with Paul Sweetman, Owner of City Books in Brighton and Hove, six messages exchanged between (25 May 2014) and (06 June 2014).

¹⁵⁶ T. Walker, 'Bookshops Have a Future', *The Independent*, 14 March 2011 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/do-bookshops-have-a-future-2240874.html>> (1 June 2014).

¹⁵⁷ Business Case Studies, 'Decentralisation within a Book Retailer' <Business Case Studies, 'Decentralisation within a Book Retailer' <www.businesscasestudies.co.uk/waterstones> (26 April 2014).> (26 April 2014).

primarily about responding better to the local market and engaging with the community. This is paramount to presenting Waterstones as a meaningful space which reflects the cultural status of its stock and places it in a separate position to its competitors the supermarkets and Amazon. It is a pragmatic policy which gives regional booksellers the power to tailor selections to the profile of their local customer base. But by restructuring and focussing on the community Waterstones is further encroaching on the niche established by the independents since 1997.

In response to the new agents that entered the bookselling field after the NBA's collapse the business practices of chains focussed on direct competition via policies of discounting, standardisation and homogenisation. Despite this, the strength of external agents who could sell books as loss leaders essentially outmanoeuvred and gradually undercut the chain's percentage of sales. From 1997 bookselling transitioned from a period where traditional retailers were dominant to a climate of confusion and contraction. Subsequently bookshops have responded to the threat of obscurity by regenerating themselves as local and cultural agents. This reflects the phenomenon explained by Bourdieu of utilising non-economic ideas, as economic practices directed towards the maximising of material or symbolic profit which is inherent in current independent and chain shop practice.¹⁵⁸

This redefining of the role of both chain and independent bookshop was not anticipated at the time of the NBA's court hearing. The strength and success of new agents alongside the streamlining of the traditional booksellers that resulted from increased competition, has contributed to a more astute brand of bookseller. Ironically, the freedom of the free market has resulted in bookseller's pursuing symbolic status as a means to compete. This also reflects the shift in economic practices that Miller refers to 'theatricality' inherent in post-modernist business practice.¹⁵⁹ In 2009 Tim Coates alluded to discernible benefits of the local and cultural movement when he wrote that increasing dwell time spent in bookstore is not an instant success, the 'arithmetic doesn't look immediately obvious, but that's often the case when you try innovative things.'¹⁶⁰ While independents have matured into their role of local and cultural agent, the chains pursued a more chaotic and risky path of economic pursuit followed by regeneration via decentralisation and cultural events. Local and cultural is not an immediately obvious strategy but the studies concerning the consumers need for a 'third place' implies that there are advantages and commercial value in adopting practices which encourage consumers to perceive bookshops as 'cross-roads of civilisation'.

¹⁵⁸ Bourdieu, *The Field of Cultural Production*, 9.

¹⁵⁹ Miller, *Reluctant Capitalists*, 240.

¹⁶⁰ Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling'.

Chapter Four: The Community and Convergence

'A city without a library is like a graveyard'

Malala Yousafzai at the opening of the Library of Birmingham

Willie Anderson describes a bookseller's distinct role as an institution or individual which has the ability to define quality and uniquely understand what their customers enjoy.¹⁶¹ Yet this definition could easily be applied to a library. Both the bookseller and the library provide the invaluable services of aiding discovery and representing and distributing the physical book to the reading public. The distinctness of their roles within the book trade was previously established by the different services they offered, the 'markets' that they operated in and the notion that one serves a consumer while the other has a user. In response to the far reaching effects of the NBA's collapse UK booksellers have strategically promoted themselves as local and cultural agents who provide for the community via educational services and book based experiences. The more symbiotic relationship between bookseller and consumer that derives from having close ties with the community suggests that the bookseller is encroaching upon the libraries established services.¹⁶² This is occurring at time when libraries are also attempting to communicate their value which amounts to a current point of convergence between library and bookshop¹⁶³

In an article on how independents should act to survive, BA chief executive Tim Godfray argued that they should cement their position as 'community and cultural hubs which also provide educational resources for all'.¹⁶⁴ The value of the community role is that it establishes long term relationships and strengthens consumer loyalty. Miller explains that that the role of the independent bookstore originally expanded to include acting as a cultural community centre as a means to distinguish themselves from the chains.¹⁶⁵ Due to increased competition the independents have strengthened their symbolic status by expanding on services which engage with the community. For example, the 'One Tree Books' shop sells tickets for local theatre

¹⁶¹ Anderson, 'Independent versus Corporate Bookselling', 145-150.

¹⁶²The growth of shelf space dedicated to books by the expansion of the chains in the 1980 and the introduction of US style superstores after 1997 did prompt some comments that bookshops look like libraries, but the difference is now they feel like libraries.

¹⁶³ Encroachment represents the move by the bookshop towards practices more traditionally offered by public libraries while convergence is more relevant to the more natural effect of libraries improving their services. Both agents are slightly altering their practice which is amounting to them moving closer together regarding target audience and image projected.

¹⁶⁴ Flood, 'Decline in independent bookshops continues with 73 closures in 2012'.

¹⁶⁵ Miller, 'Shopping for the Community', 386.

events, which is described by its owner as a 'public service'.¹⁶⁶ Co-owner of 'Bookcase' bookshop Jane Streeter said, 'we are always looking at expanding our customer base so we hope to carry on forming partnerships with local organisations.'¹⁶⁷ A strong association with the community is clearly perceived as a means to encourage new and long term customers.

Successful bookseller Nic Bottomley's business practices reflect the opinions introduced by Putnam and relayed by Wright regarding the demands of modern society. Due to a recent mentality that shopping has become a form of bonding self expression Wright believes there is a new emphasis on the romantic construction of bookshops where consumers expect more from their experience.¹⁶⁸ Bottomley describes how the emporium establishes itself as integral to the community through book clubs and other events and that this means the 'shop becomes an important part of many people's social lives.'¹⁶⁹ The idea of community based experiences has been used to set the traditional bookshop apart from spaces where commerce is more explicit such as supermarkets. It is evident that there is a duality to the post NBA persona of local and cultural agent which involves the bookshop adopting a more philanthropic role in order to survive. This conflict is inherent in most organisations concerned with culture and is not necessarily detrimental the integrity of the business. But since the NBA's collapse and the subsequently streamlining of independent bookshops they are now more successful at navigating and transferring their cultural and intellectual capital into a means to survive.

The understanding that local and cultural is a practical means of competition against new bookselling is not confined to independent stores. Laing and Royle's recent study into chain bookshops and the 'third place' reveals numerous interviews with bookshop managers who are described as keen to promote each of their bookshops as an 'independent within a chain' which reflected 'community spirit'.¹⁷⁰ A business case study on Waterstones also highlights that the company understands the value of community links and the access to customer feedback that comes from hosting localised, cultural events.¹⁷¹ Waterstones has recently delegated the co-ordination of branch events such as author signings, school based activities and reading groups to senior employees in local branches. This reflects the rhetoric at a 2014 industry conference where Daunt declared that he is 'committed to the idea that bookshops matter' and argues that

¹⁶⁶ Moss, 'A day in the life of an independent bookshop'.

¹⁶⁷ Email correspondence with Jane Streeter, Owner of the Bookcase Bookshop, Lowdham, Nottingham, Two messages exchanged between (13 May 2014) and (20 May 2014).

¹⁶⁸ D. Wright, *Work, Consumption and the Self in the UK Retail Book Trade*, 254.

¹⁶⁹ Email from Nic Bottomley, (16 May 2014).

¹⁷⁰ Laing & Royle, 'Examining Chain Bookshops in the Context of "Third Place"', 8.

¹⁷¹ <Business Case Studies, 'Decentralisation within a Book Retailer'
<www.businesscasestudies.co.uk/waterstones> (26 April 2014).

'price should not define spirit.'¹⁷² Waterstones is now more determined to re-establish itself as a supporter of culture and the community rather than places to acquire a discounted read.

The value of community services lies in making consumers more accountable for their purchases. Bottomley's emporium works with its local community through schools events, festivals and selling theatre tickets which Bottomley describes as making 'sound business sense'.¹⁷³ Children's bookshop owner Natasha Radford describes educational 'Rhythm and Rhyme' sessions and story time events as a good way of enticing families into the store.¹⁷⁴ Teicher's study explaining changing bookseller practices elucidates on these motivations when he claims that there is commercial value in pursuing a local and cultural approach. Communities with a buy local first campaign reported an average growth in sales of 8.6 % in 2012, compared to 3.4 % for those in areas without such an initiative.¹⁷⁵ This indicates that consumers increasingly understand that if you shop locally then the money spent is reinvested back into the community. The success of the campaign implies that the notion of community and accountability is what the consumer currently wants. In turn this establishes a rapport with an individual which encourages feelings of loyalty and the likelihood of repeat visits.

Providing for the community through children's events is growing as a common practice for both chain and independent stores. Every response in the interviews conducted cites children as integral to the bookshops sales practice. The 'Bookcase' bookshop and children's bookshop such as the Essex based 'Chicken and Frog' store specifically target educational services and promote the societal benefit of good reading habits.¹⁷⁶ An interview with proprietor of the 'Chicken and Frog' shop Natasha Radford reveals the incentive behind story time and reading classes. She said, 'we have aimed to become a part of the community, rather than just a local business. To that end, we provide a lot of free events.'¹⁷⁷ Although some of these events are pay for the resounding majority are free to the public. Having established in earlier chapters that the definition of the library is to provide for all, the bookshop offering similar, if not better services is a strong indicator of encroachment upon the libraries role.

Since 1997 libraries have been subject to government intervention and social and economic change which has amounted to an increasingly hostile atmosphere for publically funded institutions. The general consensus regarding the future of libraries is bleak. A survey of 174 public library authorities across England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the responses

¹⁷² Flood, 'Waterstones Boss James Daunt: 'We can sell enough books to stay alive'.

¹⁷³ Email from Nic Bottomley, (16 May 2014).

¹⁷⁴ Email correspondence with Natasha Radford, Co-owner of the Chicken and Frog Bookshop in Brentwood, Essex, two messages exchanged between (13 May 2014) and (14 May 2014).

¹⁷⁵ Teicher, 'Booksellers and Change', 130.

¹⁷⁶ The Bookcase, 'School Services', <http://www.thebookcase.co.uk/thebookcase_058.htm> (16 July 2014), Chicken and Frog, 'Tuition', <<http://chickenandfrog.com/tutoring/>> (16 July 2014).

¹⁷⁷ Email from Natasha Radford, (14 May 2014).

indicate that the current round of government cuts will include further local authority spending reductions in 2013-14 and 2014-15 which will continue in severity till at least 2020. In response libraries have also begun to promote themselves as local, cultural, convenient and educational. Recent rhetoric regarding the value of public libraries uses similar terminology as those in the retail book industry. A report on the future of libraries emphasises the importance of services and argues that a library should offer a programme of activities and events that reflect the community and that enrich lives.¹⁷⁸ This includes activities for parents and toddlers, author talks, reading groups, storytelling and reading and writing lessons. Local government minister Brandon Lewis promotes public libraries as more than merely homes for books they are, 'community hubs, centres for arts outreach and innovation, places for kids to learn and adults to take evening classes.'¹⁷⁹ The subtext of this speech is that libraries should be well integrated into the lives of its patrons outside of work and home.

It is interesting that Councillor of the London Borough of Hillingdon and primary motivator for library rejuvenation, Henry Higgins cites bookselling practices as an inspiration to enhance the services provided by the library. Higgins commissioned shop designers to improve library flow and services, and described the public library as the 'easiest form of retailing in the world'.¹⁸⁰ Public libraries have endeavoured to improve both their image and the services that they provide. In a particularly apt case the Culture and Learning Service for Buckinghamshire County Council was tasked to produce a new vision for the library through to 2017. In a report to the council one of the leads on the project Councillor Wendy Mallen described a popular strategy was to redefine the library as a 'one stop shop'.¹⁸¹ This would mean developing the library as a place on the High Street with council services including a jobcentre, crèche and coffee shop. The idea has been successfully orchestrated in Hampshire, the London Borough of Tower Hamlets and Birmingham. Essentially, libraries are aligning themselves as integral to the well being of the community and the way in which they are doing so is similar to that of the bookshop.

Library buildings are also being re-branded as Cultural Centres or Ideas Stores. The library in Hillingdon has introduced Starbucks coffee at a subsidised cost, comfortable seating and established a partnership with Apple to install Mac computers. These actions were designed

¹⁷⁸ CILIP Report, 'A Changing Landscape: A Survey of Public Library Authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2012-2013

<http://www.cilip.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/CILIP_Public_Library_Survey_Summary_Report_A_Changing_Landscape_2012-13_0.pdf> (21 June 2014).

¹⁷⁹ Press Release, 'William Sieghart to Chair Panel to Produce Independent Report on England's Public Library Service', *Department of Culture, Media & Sport*, 8 February 2014

<<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/william-sieghart-to-chair-panel-to-produce-independent-report-on-englands-public-library-service>> (5 June 2014).

¹⁸⁰ Coates, 'The Scandalous Decline of Britain's Public Libraries', 9.

¹⁸¹ Coates, 'The Scandalous Decline of Britain's Public Libraries', 6.

to acquire new users such as students who would visit the library after school to both socialise and work. The concept of the Cultural Centre with its emphasis on providing engagement and experience outside of work or the home reflects the stipulations of the 'third place'. Adopting the mentality of the 'third place' is an attempt by both agents to maintain a valuable position within society and the book trade itself. This appears to be a universal reaction to changes in society and consumer demand, but does also mean that the services provided by bookshop and library are converging.

An example of convergence in terms of services is the attempt by large libraries and bookstores to provide social spaces which offer inspiring book based experiences. Two examples of this are the recently renovated Foyles bookstore and the new Library of Birmingham opened in 2013. Birmingham and Foyles represent an amplified version of the future trajectory of the two agents in a contracting field. But for this reason they are valuable to this study as an indication of what smaller bookshops and libraries will attempt to incorporate into their future business plans. Described as a 'people's palace' by its principle designers the iconic circles adorning the Birmingham library were designed to signify the joining together of people, and to specifically reflect the diversity of the city's residents, history and architecture. The 2014 renovations of the Foyles store was a collaborative and democratic project developed by book industry professionals. The new store is designed to represent a reimagining of a bookshop in the digital age and like the Library of Birmingham the Foyles store will focus on technology, better curation, discoverability and flexible cultural spaces which encourage repeat visits.

Foyles places great emphasis on cultural legacy and providing a 'one stop shop' for visitors.¹⁸² Recent press releases on the stores website promote the shops heritage and central London location, access to signed copies, my culture app and podcasts.¹⁸³ In an interview at the think tank day in spring 2013 for the newly renovated Foyles, the publisher and digital darling Michael Bhaskar described the 'real goal' of Foyles is to guarantee that 'you come back in three months to something completely different', where a 'unique cultural experience' is constantly provided. He believes that bookshops should offer core foundations but that they should also provide services similar to a bizarre where there is always something new to entice the consumer back to the shop.¹⁸⁴ The general idea of a flexible community space is inherent in current practice and not dissimilar to the Library of Birmingham's own innovative value proposition. Both library and bookshop place great emphasis on providing a space where

¹⁸² M. Robinson, 'A Premises Move is an Opportunity to Revolutionise the Bookselling Space', *The Bookseller*, 7 December 2012, 21.

¹⁸³ <www.foyles.co.uk> (10 July 2014).

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

individuals with similar interests can enjoy book based experiences enhanced by interactive digital services.

The tagline for the library is 'Rewriting the Book' and the services available successfully convey the nonconformity of Birmingham's purpose. Alongside its 25 miles of archival material and over 800,000 volumes of text the library promotes flexible spaces which include cafés, garden terraces, a theatre, rooms for hire, whole floors of computers and interactive touch tables. These are utilised throughout the library and like what Foyles is also attempting to do are a hybrid of offline and online. Specialised services appear under the well marketed theme of 'Discover' and include reading and writing workshops. The library also curates bloggers from across a wide range of disciplines to offer insights and advice on further reading material while an advanced system of online ratings and reviews shows a deep understanding of the changing way that users view and engage with content and businesses. These are innovative ideas and which encapsulates the library's central theme.

The ways in which both the library and bookshop have responded to new competition and the growing ubiquity of digital, which due to the loss of the NBA has been more acute has been similar. Both have opted to focus on providing book based experiences which serve the community via educational services and by promoting themselves as 'third places' where individuals can socialise within a book based environment. The specific act of the bookshop focussing on providing for the community is in stark contrast to its earlier more explicitly commercial enterprises. This implies a degree of encroachment on the traditional practices of the public library designed to guarantee longevity in a sector in flux. This also appears to be indicative of the current thought in business practice that local and cultural services are of commercial value in terms of sales, link sales, customer loyalty and consumer information.

Chapter two already established that no position in the book trade is fixed and each is subject to external pressures. Due to the unforeseen events since the NBA bookshops have redefined themselves as a local and cultural agent at the same time as libraries have improved their communication regarding their value proposition. The communication circuit set out by Darnton indicates that the library and bookseller serve different purposes and it is apparent from Darnton's model that the library is closer to the reader than the bookseller. Recent attempts by the bookseller to engage with the reader suggest that the bookseller, in order to ensure survival is encroaching on services more traditionally associated to the library. However, as libraries are also improving their value proposition the negative connotations of encroachment are neutralised and the situation becomes more representative of convergence.

Convergence is not necessarily problematic. Miller believes that the commercially minded policies of the chains and independent bookshops can be nourished by connections to a

local community and move beyond profit consideration to meaningful services.¹⁸⁵ Bottomley presents the relationship between his shop and the library as harmonious and has presented to the Society of Chief Librarians on this matter. He says that 'bookshops and libraries can work with one another, learn from one another and promote one another's services.'¹⁸⁶ By providing innovative and interesting events in cultural space the bookshop and library are serving their communities better. But, since the NBA's collapse the library and bookshop have both endeavoured to justify their position within the reactionary and restrictive consumer market place. It is the longevity of this practice regarding the harmony of the book trade cycle and the equal value of its agents that is potentially problematic.

¹⁸⁵ Miller, 'Shopping for the Community', 386.

¹⁸⁶ Email from Nic Bottomley, (16 May 2014).

Conclusion

Because three pounds is just naked profiteering for a book of a mere... [checks the back pages of the book] 912 pages long. What'll I do with that extra pound? I'll add another acre to the grounds. I'll chuck a few more koi carp in my piano shaped pond. No, I know, I'll build a wing in the National Gallery with my name on it.

Bernard Black, Black Books, Season 2, Episode 4

In 2009 Tim Coates wrote that Waterstones should have responded to the threat of Amazon by 'offering something Amazon can't, the lovely, serendipitous experience of being in a really good, big bookshop.'¹⁸⁷ Having considered a broad selection of primary and secondary sources this dissertation offers the conclusion that 1997 acted as a catalyst for structural changes within the field of book retail and a redefining of the bookseller's role. These events contributed to two distinct but connected periods in UK bookselling. The first represents an era of adjustment where chain booksellers mostly engaged in discounting and standardisation while the second is characterised by its antithesis, the local and cultural movement. This dissertation has endeavoured to place these actions within the wider conceptual framework and historical context, while also considering the impact of such practices on one other particular agent, the library.

Although discounting was one of the anticipated and even motivational factors in ending the NBA, the entrance and dominance of new retailers to the market undermined the value proposition of both the chain and independent bookshops. The price war that ensued between the chains and the new external agents essentially moved them closer to commerce and away from their previous independent competitor. While the chains competed on price the independents capitalised on the symbolic nature of the product and sought to build community links and provide experiences beyond what non traditional retailers could offer. What was not widely considered at the time of the NBA's hearing was that the growing hegemony of businesses who can sell books as loss leaders would prompt a new movement in bookselling. The realisation that the practice of competing against economically more powerful agents alongside a change in consumer expectations of what a bookshop should offer has recently prompted the chain store to also decentralise and customise their services. The long term ramifications of the NBA's abolition have led to a general redefining of the bookseller's role via their willingness to pursue non-economic practices for symbolic and material gain.

¹⁸⁷ Jeffries, 'How Waterstone's Killed Bookselling'.

The local and cultural idea manifests itself as aiding discoverability and providing customised and often free book based experiences in destination stores. It is also aligned with providing integral services for the local community via either literary events or more practical functions such as reading and writing clubs for children. This mentality is reflective of 'theatricality' in current business practices and is indicative of the demand for a 'third place' beyond home and work, where a disconnected society can reengage based on similar interests. As booksellers accrue the symbolic capital which is acquired from supporting cultural events and the general customisation of business models then their brand is ostensibly moving closer to institutions which are not outwardly dependent upon sales. By focussing on their symbolic and intellectual niche traditional bricks and mortar bookshops are inadvertently, but consciously establishing and acquiring economic capital in a process which is representative of Bourdieu's description of symbolic power. Engaging with the community is a means to establish consumer loyalty in a contracting industry, but this also signifies a more symbiotic relationship between bookseller and reader that is not represented by Darnton's Communication Circuit.

This is occurring at a time when libraries are reinstating their authority regarding their position within the community. This amounts to a certain degree of convergence between the two agents which is particularly interesting regarding the recent debate on the possible subsidisation of the bookshop.¹⁸⁸ Without any form of RPM the UK bookshop is deemed to be in a vulnerable position, but any discussion regarding this issue must also consider the impact that this will have on the bookshops new counterpart or competitor, the library. This dissertation has established that a level of encroachment on the library has occurred and that the absence or introduction of legal sanctions can have far reaching and unanticipated effects.¹⁸⁹ Before any future intervention into bookselling a wider discussion on the impacts that such intervention may have should first be had.

The development from standardisation and discounting to local and cultural has been a slow evolution or readjustment, and the belief is held by some of the industry's leading experts that this is where the future lies. In an email correspondence Nic Bottomley more wisely said that there is no consensus on any aspect of the trade, the future of the bookshop could look like this [Foyles] or like our [Mr. B's Emporium] very idiosyncratic space.¹⁹⁰ Liz Thompson believes that if e-growth continues to slow that there will be increasing recognition of the continued role of bookshops, but that if it accelerates, a lot of booksellers will 'head for the hills'.¹⁹¹ The reality

¹⁸⁸ See P. Jones, 'French-Style Tax Breaks Are Not the Way to Save the UK's Small Bookshops', Z. Marosevic, 'British Booksellers Call on Government to Follow France in Fight Against Amazon', *Melville House Blog*, 7 June 2013 <<http://www.mhpbooks.com/british-booksellers-call-on-government-to-follow-france-in-fight-against-amazon/>> (1 June 2014).

¹⁸⁹ This could be of interest to other countries considering removing their FBPP.

¹⁹⁰ Email from Nic Bottomley, (16 May 2014).

¹⁹¹ Thompson, 'UK Bookselling Adjusting to the New Normal', 5-6.

is more complex than this and despite recent history, bookselling remains a product of both commerce and culture so it is likely that there will always be a few fanatics to sell books via a lovely serendipitous experience.

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