

Writing (and also reading) books reduces (sometimes) the entropy of the universe, but risks to increase (sometimes) the peace of mind in me

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Extended Abstract

In the dedication appearing in my book “Information Systems for eGovernment: a Quality of Service Perspective” written with Gianluigi Viscusi and Massimo Mecella, and published by Springer Verlag, I say: To my wife, Barbara, to my brothers Beppe and Mariella, and to all who believe that writing books contributes to reduce the disorder of the universe. During my life I have written (so far) about 35 books (including the three books in preparation), six of them in English. Publishing companies are Springer, Boringhieri, Benjamin and Cummings and subsequently Addison Wesley and Pearson, Editori Riuniti, and others. Six of them are published with Creative Commons licence, so they are accessible and downloadable by everyone.

In my talk I will make a guided tour on my book production activity, trying to show that my constant (not necessarily achieved) goal has been to clarify, to give a structure, to discover and highlight common issues in a topic usually focused on computer science, in the attempt to reduce the disorder and confusion around us in the use of terminologies, concepts and relationships among concepts.

At the same time, writing a book is a time consuming and also complex, strenuous, tirelessly activity; writing books is such as climbing a high, very high mountain, and you have to distribute forces if you want to conquer the summit, sorry, finish the book. Furthermore, when you write the last word of the last chapter, there are at least other two ninety five per cent of effort remaining.....so writing a book is like climbing three mountains, not one. And when I finish the third ninety five per cent of a book, I feel like when I reach the summit of a mountain, my endorphines play a similar role in reaching a state of satisfaction and fullness.

Looking back, I have perceived frequently in book writing what Marcel Proust says in its masterpiece *Search for the Lost Time* “From a certain age, our memories are so intertwined with each other that the thing we think about, the book we read almost no longer matters. We have put a bit of ourselves everywhere, everything is fruitful,

everything is dangerous, and we can make discoveries as important in Pascal's "Thoughts" as in the advertising of a bar of soap."

In a sense, the story of my 35 books, the change in their style, the dedications, can be seen also as a story that tells my life. As to dedications, in books and in student's dissertations, I often say that they are the most important and revealing testimony of the author.

So far, I have always written technical books, namely they address scientific topics. But now, in a time that leads to seniority (let us call the old age with a more polite term..) I'm conceiving books that besides decreasing the disorder of the universe try to decrease the entropy in myself, and try to share with the reader something more than concepts, I mean try to share emotions. This is not easy, since there is a subtle threshold between ostentation and emotional transfert. My plan is to write in the future books that merge my scientific achievements and my emotions and memories.

My life with books retraces from one side the evolution of technologies and from another side my evolution in style. I made a lot of experiences and also experiments. I have written a book using the editor of a mainframe, that had only CAPITAL LETTERS, another recent book is (on purpose) the written transcription of a video course, to achieve the goal of keeping in the text some of the freshness of the oral speech. In the first books I used the typical deductive style, where I first gave definitions and then examples, the last books are instead inductive, first examples and then definitions. I have also tried to introduce some form of interactivity in the last books, posing questions and providing solutions in a different page. As to methodological books, I have written books that have been evaluated as a "big brick", "una mattonata" in roman dialect. I think that is better una mattonata than the jungle. In another book, the only book that I have written alone, "Le basi dell'informatica", I was committed to use only the most frequent five thousand Italian words, so the word "daily" in the first row of the 164 pages has been changed into "every day", you can only imagine the cemetery of corrections in the rest of the 164 pages...

Just to understand my need to write books in all possible variants of settings, I am currently writing three books at the same time, whose titles are

1. Come si progetta un sistema informativo, with title and dedication in italian and text in english.
2. Le basi della scienza dei dati, title and text in Italian, with contributions from Federico Cabitza, Roberto Masiero, Andrea Maurino, Matteo Palmonari, Fabio Stella.
3. Abstractions in models and processes - Conceptual modeling, maps and graphs, with title and text in English, with John Mylopoulos.

Also *reading books* contributes to reduce the entropy of the universe. In an era in which a twitter of Trump reaches in a few seconds millions of followers, the life and survival of books, especially paper books, it's hard. Personally, I reached an equilib-

rium in my library between paper books that take up many centimeters of space and e-books that occupy many orders of magnitude less space. I developed a strategy on the choice of the format, based on what Ella Berthoud e Susan Elderkin say in their book “The Novel Cure: an A to Z of Literary Remedies”.

When I ascertain that my paper versions have the size of the characters too small, or else when I think I do not need the paper copy, then I buy subsequently the e-book version, when I want to “see” the book, and want to make a sensorial experience, I buy the paper copy.

I also like to donate books to my friends and colleagues. It is interesting to note that in the past I thought first to the person, and then I chose the book to donate to her/him, now when I read a book or even a review, If I like it then I identify the friend to whom to donate the book.

In Italy, the period of the week in which newspapers publish reviews of books is Saturday (Tuttolibri of La Stampa and Robinson by Repubblica) to Sunday (La Lettura by Corriere della Sera). When I look to the newspaper the first time I come to the conclusion that want to buy all the books reviewed, than the second time only the half of the books. I have decided to apply the policy to wait Sunday evening, so to intercept the natural decay in the attractiveness of books. The experience says that at end I buy on the average two/three books every week.

To conclude, Marguerite Yourcenar says in Memories of Hadrian that (in Italian) “Fondare biblioteche è come costruire ancora granai pubblici, ammassare riserve contro l'inverno dello spirito che da molti indizi, mio malgrado, vedo venire.”. “Founding libraries is like building more public granaries, amassing reserves against the winter of the spirit that with a great deal of evidence, in spite of myself, I see coming”. She was right.



Fig. 1. My books

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