

# Cites & Insights

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## Perspective

### Books, Blogs & Style

When I was starting work toward my first published book, *MARC for Library Use*, an older librarian friend who had finally published a book cautioned me: “It’s harder to write a book than it is to write a book’s worth of articles.”

Rachel Singer Gordon reports that, when she became a consulting editor with ITI’s Book Publishing Division, one of the first people she talked to asked, “Why would I write a book and wait a year or more to see my writing in print, when I can blog and get my words out there immediately?”

Horst at *The Aardvark Speaks* writes about the desire to do some writing: “Some *real* writing, not like the stuff I’ve done recently...” followed by examples of what *real* writing could be (his MSc thesis, the remaining short stories for a collection) and aren’t.

Dorothea Salo at *Caveat Lector* talks about her problems “writing in formal-publication register” and her preference for “blog register,” although she’s certainly *written* in both registers.

Chris Armstrong at *info NeoGnostic* asks “when is a book not a book?” and says “it is—and will remain—useful to be able to distinguish between the different forms of communication: informal, formal, scholarly; and short-term importance, long-term value, heritage value, etc. One of the ways this is done is by distinguishing between an e-mail, a blog posting, a newspaper article, an article in a magazine, an article in a scholarly journal, a textbook, a monograph, and so on.”

Because I made self-deprecating remarks about my own writing style in one blog conversation, Laura Crossett at *lis.dom* pointed me to George Orwell’s 1946 essay “Politics and the English language.”

Mix in Richard Poynder’s post “The basement interviews” at *Open and shut?* about a book project that became something else, “blooks,” and a few other blog posts, and you have the makings of an essay.

I’m going to cite a few tips and comments from some posts that you should definitely read if you haven’t already—and I think this essay will be meaningful, or at least interesting, for many *C&I* readers. But it’s “all about me” in at least one respect: These comments are filtered through the lens of my own experience as a writer, and I make no claim for objectivity. This isn’t just a synthesis; it’s a personal essay.

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## Books without End

Consider the process of writing books and getting them published, and how that might interact with blogs. Read Gordon’s April 11, 2006 *Liminal librarian* post “On books and blogs” ([www.lisjobs.com/liminal/](http://www.lisjobs.com/liminal/)) and Poynder’s March 6, 2006 post noted above ([poynder.blogspot.com/](http://poynder.blogspot.com/)).

### Rachel Singer Gordon

Gordon says “blogs and books scratch a different itch” just as “online and print publication complement each other.” Her topical headings on why a blogger might consider a book, in brief (her key sentences in bold, my comments following except when quoting her directly):

- **Blogs are a huge plus in marketing your book.** I’m guessing that’s true, and when (if) I write another book, I’ll try to do better in that respect. “If people like what you blog, they are likely to want to read more, and a book

gives them a nice big chunk of your work.” The same could be said for *Walt at Random* and *Cites & Insights*—except that this journal has, I believe, a much larger readership than the blog.

- **Form follows content.** Some topics deserve the kind of extended examination that results in a formal article or a book. Such extended examination could grow out of a series of blog posts, but “writing a book lets you go more in depth and to include content that might be overkill on a blog.”
- **Books reach a different audience.** True—and they reach the same people in different roles. I read books differently than I read blogs. “A large cross-section of the library community is more comfortable picking up a book rather than turning to a blog when they want to know more on a given topic.”
- **You get paid for writing books.** True, most of the time (unless you’re self-publishing), although (as Gordon says) you’re not going to get rich writing for librarians.
- **Seeing your name on a book is just darn cool.** There’s no way around that—and your name on the spine of a book is different from your name in the table of contents (or even on the banner) of a journal.
- **Writing a book offers a certain permanence.** “People get tired of blogging, move on change URLs, change interest, take their writing offline.” I got email this morning asking whether I thought a \$10 used copy of *MARC for Library Use* (2d. edition) was still worth having, 17 years after publication. That may not be immortality, but it’s not bad.
- **Writing a book looks good to others.** “Others, in this case, being a tenure committee, potential employers, your mom, your colleagues, conference organizers, what have you.” One caveat: Don’t be surprised if your mom doesn’t *read* your second or third book.
- **Writing a book lets you work with nice people.** My experience with the folks at ALA Editions has always been positive; I consider my editor and the designer both friends. My experience with Knowledge Industry Publications people was positive as well; problems occurred with G.K. Hall, but those were corporate issues. I don’t know that all book peo-

ple are good people, but there are a lot of good book people out there.

- **Writing a book helps you write anything else.** And vice-versa, to be sure. I’m not sure that conference presentations are inherently easier than books, but at least they’re shorter.
- **Writing a book helps the profession.** Even for those of us who aren’t entirely part of the profession.
- **You can do both.** Yep. My failure to write any books since 2003, and only three books in the last 13 years, has nothing to do with *Walt at Random* and very little to do with *Cites & Insights*. Gordon cites cases where authors are using blogs to support book projects or expect a book to grow out of a blog; in other cases, book writers use blogs to say the things that don’t work in the book.

The comments are also interesting, including those from a couple of active blogging librarians who feel they’re too new to the field to be book writers. That’s how I felt when I was writing *MARC for Library Use* (without a contract), but I did it anyway: Sometimes the need is just there.

### *Richard Poynder*

Richard Poynder, an experienced journalist and freelance writer, offers a slightly different perspective: What happens when a good idea for a book becomes a contracted book—and the contract comes unglued even though the idea still makes sense?

His idea was to interview some of the key people in various “open” movements, turn each interview into a chapter, and “top and tail the interviews with an opening chapter introducing the various movements, and generally setting the scene, and a closing chapter in which I would try to sum up what I had learned from the interviews.”

Poynder drafted a proposal and sent it to several publishers. Some publishers wanted “balance” from companies and organizations whose business models are being challenged by the “open” models. Poynder couldn’t see doing it that way (and I think he’s right). O’Reilly, however, “had built a formidable reputation as a supporter of the Open Source Movement” and their website “actively canvasses for books with ‘Big Picture Technology, Social Impact, and Geek Culture’ themes.” So Poynder emailed O’Reilly a proposal. His “six rules” pick up from there—and I won’t detail the whole odd story, since Poynder tells it eloquently.

Here are the rules themselves, stripped of Poynder's commentary, with the caveat that rule three makes very little sense *without* the commentary:

- Rule one: e-mail is a very precarious way of communicating with potential publishers.
- Rule two: e-mail can nevertheless be a very effective way of reaching inside a publisher, if you can find a direct path to the top guy.
- Rule three: as we continue to make the transition to a global networked economy publishing business models are increasingly vulnerable; and nice guys clearly finish last!
- Rule four: no one yet knows the right formula for online publishing, and every new project is a step into the unknown.
- Rule five: in the age of the Web anyone can be a publisher.
- Rule six: If you have something you really want to publish, just do it. It's that easy now!

In Poynder's case, it's about a tentatively-contracted book gone south and Poynder's eventual decision to do the interviews anyway, publish introductions to each interview on the blog, offer a link to each full interview in PDF form (they're *long* interviews), and invite a small voluntary PayPal contribution if the reader thinks it's warranted. "Of course, I don't know if *anyone* will pay, but I am hopeful *some* will."

It will be interesting to see how it turns out and whether Poynder eventually chooses to produce the book itself either as a PoD self-publication or through a publisher willing to take a chance on material that's available through a Creative Commons license.

### *Chris Armstrong, Walt Crawford and others*

Chris Armstrong posted "And when is a book not a book?" on April 5, 2006 (i-a-l.blogspot.com); I've already noted his central point. He also quotes Momus on "blooks" (books that began as blogs):

What is a blook? It's a blog that turns into a book, the way, in evolution, mammals went back into the sea and became fish again. Except they didn't really do that, although undoubtedly some of us still enjoy a good swim.

OK—so there is going to be evolution amongst these forms, and strange hybrids will emerge. OK; but they are still named and distinguished from each other. I think there is a qualitative difference between a book, a blook and an 'intelligent conversation in networks.' And I think that readers have to be able to recognize and respond to this difference.

A bit of background: This sentiment emerged after Momus visited The Institute for the Future of the Book, which produces the *if:book* blog. I had *if:book* in

my Bloglines list for some time but finally dropped it—because, as Momus says, "it seems they're assuming that the book itself is already over." Maybe this Institute has it right, maybe the self-standing linear story printed on paper and bound between covers is archaic and has no future—but I'm not buying, and it turns out that what IF seems to be selling didn't interest me enough to keep following. (Caution: That may be me, not them.)

What of blooks? There's a prize for them now, courtesy of Lulu, a PoD self-publisher. I'm not going to say they can't be worthwhile, any more than I'd call books consisting of collected columns or articles or short stories worthless; I've read, enjoyed, and learned from such collections.

For that matter, a blog could turn into a book that is as seamless a narrative as the best science fiction novels that began life as series of novellas and novelets. Sometimes the authors paste the pieces together such that they become a seemingly unified whole; sometimes the seams are as obvious as on Frankenstein's creation. Would a book created from blog posts as (part of the) raw materials, that emerges as a well-organized linear story, be a blook? I don't think so, although the author might find such a claim useful for marketing purposes.

A *BusinessWeek* online article, "Blooks' are in bloom," discusses a few successful blooks—but also the notion that "every single blogger" could choose to self-publish their blog as a book, a distressing vision of Blurb.com's CEO. Blurb.com and Blogbased-books.com both expect to make money doing little more than turning blogs into blooks. Thirtysix million books made up of blog posts, with 75,000 new ones each day? Are we ready for that?

Meanwhile, if you have something in mind more coherent than a few hundred miscellaneous blog posts, think about Poynder's last three rules. I don't know whether Richard Poynder reads *Cites & Insights* or is even aware that it exists (although the latter is likely, given overlapping interests in open access), but this here journal is certainly an example of rules four and five. I didn't intend it to be unique when I started it, and I'm not sure it really is—but this print-formatted web-based mostly-topical single-author library-oriented free-to-the-reader periodical is certainly part of a small group. (*Ex Libris* isn't print-formatted. *Library Juice* ceased publication, as did *New Breed Librarian*—and that wasn't a one-person show. The closest counterpart may be *SPARC Open Access*

News.) So far, *C&I* makes sense from a standpoint of economics and reach, more sense than any alternative I've thought of. I hope Poynder's unusual experiment also succeeds—which may depend on how Poynder defines success.

*If you have something you really want to publish, just do it.* And “publishing” can taken any number of forms, including PoD self-published books, a series of articles disguised as a blog, a growing bibliography with updates issued as blog entries...

I'll add some of my own notes about writing and publishing books:

- **Every book can (and maybe should) be a wholly different process.** Except for two cases in which I wrote second editions, I believe that's true of all my books to date. Each one was *fundamentally* different, from start to finish. That's not always the case, to be sure, and for some kinds of fiction it shouldn't be the case (would you really want each Travis McGee novel to have an entirely different structure and tone?). Some publishing trends encourage books written to a template. I suspect very prolific nonfiction authors churn out new books “just like the last book, but on X instead of Y”; and maybe there's nothing wrong with that. Still, template books will never be as fresh or original for the reader *or* writer as books done as true originals.
- **You can write a book without a contract.** There are advantages to preparing a proposal, taking it to a publisher, and getting a contract before you've written the book. There are *also* advantages to doing the whole bloody thing “on spec” (speculating that you'll be able to find a publisher). I couldn't imagine writing my first book any way other than “on spec”: Set deadlines or lengths or whatever might have deep-sixed the entire project, and the lassitude of the first publisher in responding at all would certainly have discouraged me.
- **You don't need an agent and may not want one.** That's for books within librarianship, certainly not for mainstream fiction. The publishers I've dealt with don't really want to deal with agents—and no sensible agent will do much work for 15% of the sums that library books typically earn.
- **Learn to work with editors, designers and indexers.** This one's tough, especially if you

have skills in any of these areas. Your acquisitions editor—the person you deal with directly at a publishing house—should always be a source of good advice. Otherwise, you've chosen the wrong publishing house. Copy editors may be freelance contractors and may not really understand the topics you're writing about; in such cases, remember that copy editing is usually advisory, not final. Indexers? If you can do your own professional-quality index, you may save some of your advance—but an index is *vital* to a nonfiction book, and indexing is tough. As for design: I love typography, I did camera-ready copy for quite a few of my books (including *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness & Reality* and *Being Analog*) in consultation with the publisher's designers; and I also know that *good* book design involves special expertise. The best-looking book I've done is the most recent, *First Have Something to Say*—and I did not play any part in designing that book, which was laid out and composed at ALA Editions. Your mileage will vary. If you know more about good typography than your publisher appears to, see if you can make that knowledge work to improve your book. But if your publisher has good book designers, work with them, not against them.

Finally, note that another library wiki has started up, this one for library authors: LISauthor wiki ([www.blisspix.net/lisauthor/](http://www.blisspix.net/lisauthor/)) from Fiona at *blisspix.net*. It's young and still a bit sparse, but it's a plausible place to gather and add information for the community of library-related authors.

## Blogs and Style

Angel, *The gypsy librarian*, had some thoughts on “knowing when not to post” in an April 12, 2006 entry. **Go read it** ([gypsylibrarian.blogspot.com](http://gypsylibrarian.blogspot.com)).

CW at *Ruminations* (one of that growing band of interesting Australian libbloggers worth reading) wrote about “blog burnout” on April 9 ([flexnib.blogspot.com](http://flexnib.blogspot.com)), when she found that a regularly read blog “seemed to no longer exist.” She sent email to the blogger, who answered that all was well, except for the blog: “I killed it.” Turns out the blogger had been writing something like a blog for over six years and was “well and truly over it.” The blogger feels “kind of liberated now.” Blog burnout does happen.

As was reported on April 19 in Sarah Hepola's *Slate* column, "This is my last entry." She begins:

One morning last month, I woke early, finished a book I'd been reading, and shut down my blog.

This blog had run for nearly five years and included lots of stuff "which I hoped, eventually, might lead to a novel." For Hepola, the recognition was clear: "Blogging wasn't helping me write; it was keeping me from it."

She'd realized this before—but the moment would pass and she'd have more stories to pass along. She couldn't help but notice successful bloggers-turned-novelists (or at least book-writers). But somehow, instead of blogging being a run-up to a novel, "it had...become a major distraction." She'd sit down to work on the novel—and come up with five different blog entries. And so on. Hepola suspects she'll come back to blogging eventually. "Now, if I could just turn off the TV, I think I could finally get started."

That resonates in some ways. I'm fortunate that it's mostly the blog that suffers. When I was writing three columns (two monthly), I'd use one column as an excuse to "postpone" another, and *C&I* as an excuse to "postpone" that one (postpone in quotes because I always stayed ahead of deadlines as a matter of self-preservation). With one monthly column gone and another changed to every other month, I *could* use blog entries as a way to put off *C&I*—but so far that hasn't happened. Books? A different problem.

CW commented on the *Slate* column in an April 24 post with the same title as the column, quickly followed by "Did that get your attention? Sorry, this is not my last entry." CW then discussed a response to her questionnaire for libloggers (which I responded to, and am eagerly awaiting the results of) and her own experience. For CW, blogging isn't "keeping me from anything." So far, it's helped her to write. She treats blogging as a daily writing routine; as with most such routines, that's improved her ability to write.

All of which means...I'm not sure what. I can see why people shut down blogs, either as distractions or for other good reasons. I can see that an active blog could be a distraction from larger projects, unless you turn it into a support for the larger projects.

I'm going to close with a quick note on the George Orwell piece mentioned near the beginning of this not-so-brief commentary, the one Laura Crossett pointed me to. I had commented on my writing style, "Asimovian" but without his elegance and creativity. I use short words and a relatively simple vocabulary. It's

intentional, if by now also habitual. (Short *sentences*—that's another issue, along with consistent and correct punctuation.) Specifications for *EContent* column length are, like most such specifications, based on word count but intended to support printed page length. In 2006, you'd almost expect that publishers would switch to character-count specs, since it's not that difficult to get a character count and that count has a *lot* more to do with fitting a column on a page. Anyway, I use short words: The "700 words" of the contract turned out to be *way* too short. I now provide 820 to 850 words, and I don't believe the editor trims that much from my copy.

George Orwell's essay is on obfuscation through language. He writes of dying metaphors, verbal false limbs ("render inoperative") and eliminating simple verbs, pretentious diction, meaningless words—and some guidelines for keeping writing clear and straightforward. My guess is that Orwell was disturbed by trends he saw as general and worsening. My guess is also that Orwell would be delighted by blogs, at least some of them. There's a return to simple, clear, fresh diction. Maybe there are too many one-sentence paragraphs; maybe simplicity can be taken too far. But you see less polysyllabic blather in blogs than you do in scholarly articles, and I think the tendency toward clear, direct language is spilling over into other media.

As one who no longer knows *how* to write suitably pretentious prose, and as one who never cared to read it, I love Orwell's essay and like the blogging trend. Having your own style is a good thing. Basing that style on clarity and simplicity doesn't hurt.

### Following Up and Feedback

## Vaidhyathan's Not Norton

First an apology. In *C&I* 6:6, I took Siva Vaidhyathan to task for apparently concluding that he knows more about librarianship than the directors of Michigan, Stanford, Oxford, and Harvard libraries and NYPL. I included an analogy based on my belief that Gale Norton also seems to believe she knows more about the environment than environmentalists and environmental scientists. The analogy was badly worded and made an inappropriate comparison.

I apologize for that analogy. Siva Vaidhyathan clearly does favor libraries, even if he disagrees with

many librarians and views the Google Library Project in harshly negative terms.

I do *not* apologize for criticizing Vaidhyanathan's extreme negativism regarding Google Library Project, his assertion that the case law on fair use "is totally hostile to Google," and his claims that the Google 5 libraries "have abrogated their responsibility to defend the very values that librarianship supports."

A multipart conversation—partly blogs and comments, partly email—took place regarding this whole situation. (The conversation also involved Seth Finkelstein and "Not Liz.") I saved most of the conversation in the thought that a followup might be worthwhile, and got Prof. Vaidhyanathan's permission to quote any or all of his email. On reflection, I don't believe that followup would serve a purpose. The public portion of the discussion is out there. The private followup was cordial. I recognize that Vaidhyanathan takes forceful stances; in most cases, those forceful stances are beneficial.

### When 1080 is 540

An item in February's TRENDS & QUICK TAKES (*C&I* 6:3, p. 18) noted Gary Merson's tests, reported in *The Perfect Vision*, finding that most HDTV sets currently on the market were displaying 1080i (the most common form of broadcast HDTV, 1080 lines transmitted as two 540-line fields of "odd" or "even" lines, 60 times a second, to be interlaced into a 30-frame-per-second picture) *not* by "weaving" the two fields into a single image but by "bobbing," upconverting each 540-line field into a picture.

Merson's testing is reported in more detail in the March 2006 *Home Theater*, including a full list of models tested and how they scored and an illustrated discussion of the problem. This time around, just over half of the TVs (28 of 54) processed and deinterlace 1080i properly, but more than 48% did not.

Of makes with multiple TVs tested, JVC and Toshiba's all passed, LG and RCA all failed. "Generally speaking, manufacturers who do not advertise that their displays properly interface 1080 may not." (Hitachi and Pioneer also advertise that their displays do so—and the single model from each make did pass.) Otherwise, figure that more recent and higher-end displays are more likely to pass, e.g., all of Sony's tested XBR displays passed. The surprising ones are two Mitsubishi's and one Sharp with 1080 native resolution that didn't pass the test.

## Trends, Quick Takes & Good Stuff

# The Well-Connected Traveler

That's the title of a long cover story in *PC Magazine* 25:5 (March 21, 2006). It includes "Essential Gear" with pictures and brief descriptions, "bag searches" showing some folks' travel gear, "best connected" air-lines, airports, and hotels, and related items.

I loved "the ideal travel bag": *twenty items*, putting the lie to convergence at least in this case. The set includes a notebook computer, a Treo PDA, a multimedia photo viewer and, presumably, music player, a GPS unit, a Dell Windows Mobile PDA, an iPod—six portable computing/communications devices in all. I count \$5,000 to \$6,000 in gear, *not* including the thumb drive, SD cards, DVDs, batteries, and cables.

Maybe I shouldn't be surprised. Jim Louderback travels with a ThinkPad, a Creative Zen multimedia player, a Treo, an iPod, and another Creative Zen, along with a Nintendo DS game machine. Apparently you really do need five screens (the iPod's a screenless Shuffle) to get through a day on the road.

### Mac Attacks in 2006

Sure, *PC Magazine* started out covering PCs (systems running MS-DOS or PC-DOS), but in recent years it's devoted considerable coverage to Apple products, and that coverage has always been fair. "Mac Attack!" in the March 21, 2006 issue isn't staff-written; it's by Robert Lemos, a freelance journalist and editor-at-large for SecurityFocus.

Lemos anticipates major attacks on Mac OS X in 2006—and notes that *more* software flaws were found in Mac OS X in 2005 than in Windows XP. The move to Intel means hackers can use assembly code to attack Macs; the iPod seems likely to increase Mac's market share; and, I'm guessing, Mac users are more likely not to worry about antivirus software.

"There's only one certainty in computer security: An attack will eventually get through your defenses. Be ready for it."

### TV on the Net

Harry McCracken muses on the legal video download situation in his April 2006 "Up Front" column in *PC World*. He calls it a "booming trend," with Apple offering more than 40 TV series for sale (*sans* commercials,

but at a hefty \$1.99 per episode), CBS selling shows directly and through Google, NBC streaming nightly news for free, and various others.

He believes the “revolution” (if there is one) won’t really happen until download/streaming services work directly with TV sets, but sees faster and more “bulletproof” wireless networking solving that problem. Sure, but lots of sane people don’t keep their PCs running 24x7 (particularly if they care about power and the ecology). Next, he wants to see *lots* more stuff available. Third—and this is one people have been glossing over—picture quality needs to be at least as good as broadcast quality, and so far it generally isn’t. Finally, internet TV needs to “get easy”—and, as with the proliferation of downloadable music services, divergence is making that a distant goal.

Right now, the situation’s worse than with portable music players. Apple shows won’t play on any portable player except a video iPod. Vongo “touts its ability to copy movies to handhelds that run Microsoft’s Portable Media Center version 2 (total count of such products at press time: zero).” Google doesn’t seem to be sure what should work.

McCracken’s a believer for the long term, but McCracken’s a PC writer: To some extent, it’s his business to believe. “Someday, most of the video we watch will be delivered over the Internet”—maybe, maybe not, and who says the internet is the final word?

## High-Def DVDs Hit the Market

It’s finally happened, and it’s probably going to be ugly. The first Toshiba HD-DVD players in the U.S. went on sale in early April, with something like three (count ‘em, *three*) movies available, priced a little higher than regular DVDs. The first Blu-ray players will be out in May, maybe (although Blu-ray *recorders* have been available in Japan for a while).

Dan Tynan discusses the situation in his April 2006 “Gadget Freak” column in *PC World*, and maybe the tease is all you need: “Should you buy a new HD disk player? Probably, but not anytime soon.”

He gives a concise version of the usual arguments in favor of each format. He notes that Broadcom already makes a chip set that would allow a device to play both Blu-ray and HD-DVD discs. He also notes that “managed copy,” a DRM tweak that would let you make *one* copy of a movie and play it across *your* home network, should be coming—but it’s not here yet (and high-def DVD DRM is a lot tougher than regular DVD protection).

Right now, Blu-ray has more studio support and a *lot* more manufacturer support as well as higher capacity—but HD-DVDs are cheaper to produce, giving them a slight edge. PlayStation 3 will include a Blu-ray player. The Xbox 360 will support external HD-DVD drives.

Maybe Tynan’s dentist has the right way to decide: “I think Blu-ray will win. It’s got a better name.” Or maybe, if most HDTV owners don’t know or care whether they actually see HDTV, they also won’t care about the difference between 480p DVD scaled up to HDTV and true high-definition DVD. The equivalent seems to be happening with high-resolution audio. (That’s not a perfect analogy. Many people can’t hear the difference between high-res and regular CD audio, even with practice. Most people should be able to tell the difference between true high-definition and up-scaled DVD, at least on a large, high-quality HDTV. Will they care? That’s another quesiton.)

## The Trouble with Ebooks

Richard Leiter at *The life of books* (thelifeofbooks.blogspot.com) asks “What’s the trouble with ebooks,” noting Elinor Mills’ “E-books, has your time come?” (news.com, April 5, 2006). Leiter notes something that continues to surprise me in such stories:

What’s especially interesting about the article and the quotes is that the clear presupposition is that the technology will inevitably “evolve” from books to online... It seems that everyone assumes (wants?) that books will eventually go away! As though this new technology is going to change reality!

Can’t anyone see that if e-books “take off” it may only be in a very small niche market and for a very small band of [aficionados?] Books may well remain the predominant format for books. (!)

The story talks about breathing “fresh life into a seemingly moribund market,” given the Sony Reader. “The news raises a question: Is there suddenly a market for what so far has been a novelty act?” It notes that Microsoft started promoting ebooks with Barnes & Noble in 2000—an effort that culminated in Barnes & Noble discontinuing sales three years later. It quotes Steve Potash of Overdrive saying “major publishers, schools and universities, and public libraries have come around and are jumping on the bandwagon.”

Gregory Newby (Project Gutenberg) starts with a strange comment: “We don’t see a lot of resistance to electronic books per se.” *Resistance?* Shouldn’t there be *enthusiasm?* Newby cites “specialized readers and difficulty in finding good stuff to read” as problems, as

well as publishers' tendency to charge the same for a download as for a paper book. He also notes that people like to share books with others, resell them and hand them down to their children. "When you buy a book, you have it forever. With these electronic books, you often are prevented from doing those things that you can do with regular books."

Newby says you need things that paper books *don't* have, such as interactivity and mixed-media capabilities, "to be compelling enough to trigger any kind of mass migration away from paper books." He mentions alternate endings and moving pictures, "a pretty exciting change from plain old paper." David Bass of Ebrary also talks about "experience-oriented" ebooks, "more than a book." There's nothing really new about books becoming movies (which, let's face it, is what this is all about)—but somehow reading has survived and prospered, with people who like to add their own mental pictures.

Thank heavens for market analysts: They can always project a big market. A Shore Communications expert says flatly, "Reading books electronically *will take off*, but I think a higher proportion will be read on a handheld [multifunction] device." [Emphasis added.] By avoiding a date and not defining "take off," it's a safe projection.

So how are ebooks actually doing? As always, it depends on your definition of ebook—but the International Digital Publishing Forum touts "continued increases in ebook revenue for 2005" in an April 18, 2006 press release. Increase to what? \$11,875,783 revenue for 1,692,964 ebook "units" (about \$7 per "unit")—*worldwide*. Note also that the headline *only* discusses increased revenue—because actual sales are "taking off" so rapidly that "ebook units sold remained even with 2004." Meanwhile, titles published increased 20%. Revenue increase was 23%. In short, more ebook titles sold fewer copies each, but at higher prices.

How does that compare to boring old non-interactive paper books? The American Association of Publishers reports total U.S. book sales at \$25.1 billion, up 9.1% from 2004 (a surprisingly healthy increase). That's U.S., not world, but let's ignore that. AAP's growth rate comes to \$1.4 billion for the year. Thus, *total worldwide* ebook sales weren't quite 1% of the *increase* in overall U.S. book sales—and are less than one-twentieth of one percent of total U.S. book sales. Ebooks are still at the rounding-error stage—and "same number of units" and a pricing-driven

growth in sales suggest ebook demand has flattened. Maybe the Sony Reader will make a big difference; maybe not. (AAP says there were \$179 million in ebook sales in 2004: Definitions of "ebook" and "sales" really do differ, although even \$179 million is still considerably less than 1% of the U.S. market. There's some reason to believe that AAP's figure is closer to the mark, if you include all forms of etext sales and leasing as ebook sales.)

I don't believe that ebooks are going to replace trade books to any great extent. Ebooks *should* replace a fair percentage of textbooks and reference books, if the readers work properly. The K12 and higher education book markets add up to \$10 billion U.S. in 2005. With half-decent reading systems (presumably using PDAs or notebooks in the higher ed market) and publisher cooperation, you'd think ebooks should have at least a quarter of that market, if not half. Just a quarter would be \$2.5 billion—or a market *more than two hundred times* what IDPF says it is now. Without displacing a single trade book.

## Quicker Takes

If you believe mp3.com's testing, there's another disadvantage to Digital Restrictions Management (DRM, and yes, I know the "R" is supposed to mean "Rights"): Playing DRM songs drained battery power 25% faster on Windows Media players and 8% faster on iPods than playing the same songs in unprotected MP3 format. But, according to *Freedom to tinker's* report of this story, you shouldn't believe mp3.com: The DRMed files were bigger, so naturally used more power. It may not be possible to distinguish "bigger because of DRM" from "bigger because less aggressive compression." And maybe that's not the point, according to Ed Felten. Different file formats and levels of compression offer different tradeoffs—storage space, sound quality, battery life. (I'm slowly ripping all of my CDs at 320K because I believe I *may* be able to sense the inadequacies of 192K MP3. That's my trade-off.) But with DRM, you don't get to make the choice: DRM either eliminates your choices of format and compression or severely limits those choices. (I'm inclined to believe that handling DRM must involve *some* additional computation, but it may be down at the 1%-or-less level.)

- *Library Success: A Best Practices Wiki* isn't a year old yet, but it's growing. Founder Meredith Farkas reports lots of development in online reference, gaming, browser extensions,



website design, online communities, and podcasting. Have you visited yet? Have you contributed? Wouldn't we be better off with one big wiki celebrating *all kinds* of library success stories, rather than starting up new wikis devoted to success using one set of technologies? [www.libsuccess.org](http://www.libsuccess.org): Check it out.

## The Good Stuff: Articles Worth Reading

Miller, Michael J., "Twenty years of Windows," *PC Magazine* 24:19/20 (November 8, 2005): 119-64.

Twenty years? Not really—at least not for most of us. Yes, Windows 1.0 was released in November 1985 (announced in November 1983)—but the first Windows most people considered using was either Windows 3.0 (May 1990) or Windows 3.0a with multimedia support (October 1991). I used a graphical interface for desktop publishing in the late 1980s—but it was Digital Research's GEM environment, which shipped as part of Ventura Publisher and ran over DOS.

This set of articles is fascinating and **well worth reading**. It includes an interview with Bill Gates, comments from many Windows developers and competitors, a timeline of Windows and related developments, and more.

Boase, Jeffrey, John B. Horrigan, Barry Wellman and Lee Rainie, *The strength of internet ties*, Pew Internet & American Life Project, January 25, 2006. [www.pewinternet.org](http://www.pewinternet.org)

The big type on the front page of this 62-page report: "The internet and email aid users in maintaining their social networks and provide pathways to help when people face big decisions." The report is based on two February-March surveys, one in 2004 and one in 2005, each involving some 2,200 adults. The 2004 survey considered social ties; 2005 looked at "major life decisions."

The report is interesting—but one reason I've delayed talking about it is that it didn't strike me as revelatory.

Consider the boldface statements forming sub-headings in the nine-page summary of findings:

- The internet helps build social capital.
- The internet plays socially beneficial roles in a world moving toward "networked individual-

ism." Email allows people to get help from their social networks and the web lets them gather information and find support and information as they face important decisions.

- The internet supports social networks.
- Email is more capable than in-person or phone communication of facilitating regular contact with large networks.
- Email is a tool of "glocalization." It connects distant friends and relatives, yet it also connects those who live nearby.
- Email does not seduce people away from in-person and phone contact.
- People use the internet to put their social networks into motion when they need help with important issues in their lives.
- The internet's role is important in explaining the greater likelihood of online users getting help as compared to non-users.
- Americans' use of a range of information technologies smooths their paths to getting help.
- Those with many significant ties and access to people with a variety of different occupations are more likely to get help from their networks.
- Internet users have somewhat larger social networks than non-users. The median size of an American's network of core and significant ties is 35. For internet users, the median network size is 37; for non-users it is 30.
- About 60 million Americans say the internet has played an important or crucial role in helping them deal with at least one major life decision in the past two years.
- The number of Americans relying on the internet for major life decisions has increased by one-third since 2002.
- At major moments, some people say the internet helps them connect with other people and experts who help them make choices. Others say the web helps them get information and compare options as they face decisions.

Set aside the neologism in the fifth bullet—and let's not focus on "networked individualism," a vaguely oxymoronic notion that compares to "virtual communities" in its semi-meaningfulness. My response to these assertions, and the discussion that backs them

up, is twofold: “Probably true” and “Not particularly useful or actionable.”

Unless someone’s still trying to label email as the tool of the devil or the internet *in general* as a passing fancy, that is. Maybe I run in the wrong circles, but the people I’ve heard putting down email are scarcely saying that it’s bad because it replaces personal communication. More likely, they’re frustrated with spam, phishing, and the other evils of an enormously successful communications medium and urging use of something newer and “better” (IM, for example).

Maybe this report is enormously helpful in combating the idea that community is disappearing in America, the whole “bowling alone” notion. In which case I’m the wrong audience, because I didn’t buy that notion. We’ve seen the opposite: Our move to the heart of Silicon Valley put us on a street where we’re acquainted with most of our neighbors and likely to ask their advice and call on them for help. (There are even occasional block parties.) That’s never been the case before. My sense is that real communities within Mountain View are stronger than they’ve ever been.

The just-as-real but less face-to-face communities I’m involved in (you could call them “virtual communities,” but that’s misleading) *rely* on the internet. Email, to be sure; that’s the backbone of one-to-one and one-to-many conversation on the internet. But also blogs (and comment streams) and other forms. I have *no doubt* that IM and chat help maintain and build communities for those who use them: How would it be otherwise?

“People who communicate more with other people tend to know more people, get more help from other people, and become more aware of other people.” There’s a quick summary of the whole report, which I could have written without ever seeing the report. All else is details. (“Glocalization”? Yecch.)

It’s a well-written report. It may inform you more than it did me—and I hope it convinces you, if you need convincing.

## Bibs & Blather

# Tweaking the Sections

TRENDS, QUICK TAKES AND GOOD STUFF? Aren’t those two separate sections? Sure, just as FOLLOWING UP and FEEDBACK have been two separate sections. But as with the latter two, I found that “the good stuff”—articles that I wanted to comment on that neither fell

into some other standing section nor deserved a full-scale PERSPECTIVE—either yielded a very brief section or got held too long for comfort.

The purpose of ongoing sections is to provide focus, not to age source material: I can do that without any help. As foci shift, it’s only reasonable to shift section names and inclusions. (People with long memories will note that THE GOOD STUFF was originally PRESS WATCH I: ARTICLES WORTH READING, back when I was “watch”ing things...and that PRESS WATCH II: COMMENTARY became CHEAP SHOTS & COMMENTARY, then disappeared altogether, since I never take cheap shots anymore. Except in MY BACK PAGES, and TRENDS & QUICK TAKES, and on *Walt at Random*, and...)

Section names provide manila folder labels. Folders gather material. Sometimes, chunks of that material turn into separate PERSPECTIVES—or get big enough to deserve their own folders, or become special issues. Eventually, in certain cases, folders stay so slender that the section disappears. Other folders may arise or be separated into subfolders.

This essay contains another tweak: Two cases where I want to call attention to an ongoing phenomenon I believe readers should be paying attention to, but don’t quite see the discussion as suitable for either a full-scale PERSPECTIVE or an existing section. See below, just past the next announcement.

## Now Appearing in YBP Academia

I’m delighted to say that, as part of the YBP sponsorship of *Cites & Insights*, certain select *C&I* essays will also appear in the YBP electronic resource *Academia* ([www.ybp.com/Academia](http://www.ybp.com/Academia)). I’ll forward an appropriate essay four to six times a year, sometimes modifying the essay slightly so it works better as a standalone piece. As with *C&I* itself, the YBP people have made it clear that they neither seek nor desire any editorial role in these essays. I may provide more than they use, but they won’t modify the ones that do appear.

As with YBP’s sponsorship in general, this should be a win:win:win situation.

## InfoTangle: Blog as Formal Journal

I’ve mentioned *InfoTangle* ([infotangle.blogspot.com/](http://infotangle.blogspot.com/)) before, commenting on two of Ellyssa Kroski’s article/posts in *C&I* 6:4 and 6:6. “Community 2.0” (posted April 7, 2006) is another good read and worthwhile addition to the literature, five pages followed by 40 references. Kroski considers varieties of online communities and the tools they use, and dis-

cusses possible meanings of all this. I may be skittish about “2.0” terms in general, but Kroski provides a solid, readable introduction.

Kroski is doing something unusual and interesting here: Using a blog as a lightweight publishing platform for fully formed articles replete with references. It’s not the way I would do it—and that’s a compliment. It’s not the way I’ve seen *anyone* do it, at least in the library field. No single model of “new publishing” suits everyone any more than one single medium suited everyone in the “old media.” I don’t anticipate commenting on every *InfoTangle* article. I do anticipate reading them, in both senses of “anticipate”: I expect to do so—and I look forward to it.

### TechEssence.Info

“The essence of technology for library decision-makers.” That’s an ambitious claim, and I’m not sure how you’d judge the ability of this site to live up to it, but TechEssence.info is off to one heck of an interesting start. Want the URL? Look at the heading. Want the mission statement?

You’re busy. You don’t have time for a lot of jargon, techie posturing, or attitudes. You’ve come to the right place. We don’t put you down, we don’t talk down to you, we just give it to you straight. Come here for accurate, understandable explanations of important information technologies for libraries. Go elsewhere for the hype.

Roy Tennant started it on November 17, 2005. The first topical post was January 30, 2006. It didn’t pick up steam until late March or early April 2006.

In addition to Tennant, *TechEssence* features Andrew Pace, Dorothea Salo, Eric Lease Morgan, Jenn Riley, Jerry Kuntz, Lori Bowen Ayre, Marshall Breeding, Meredith Farkas, and Thomas Dowling. That’s quite a group, including a fair chunk of LITA’s Top Technology Trendies, several well-known bloggers in their own right, and just generally folks with varied experience, knowledge and style.

*TechEssence* has two parts, both using blog technology and allowing comments from registered users. One part, Technologies, provides “executive summaries” (typically no more than two print pages) for terms and technologies librarians need to know about. The other, Blog, consists of tight, focused entries on a variety of tech-related topics.

A sampling from April: Roy Tennant on “Making good technology decisions”; Eric Lease Morgan on “Mass digitization”; Dorothea Salo providing a “Digital preservation overview”; Meredith Farkas “On uses for

wikis and gardening”; Dorothea Salo’s “A paean to the text editor”; Roy Tennant’s “A paean to the prototype”; Jenn Riley on “The trap of ‘fixing it later’”; Thomas Dowling’s “Communique from the front lines of citation linking”; Dorothea Salo on “Making a sandbox”; Meredith Farkas “On getting staff members to buy into a new technology.”

That’s in a span of 14 days—but it’s not a flood of stuff, too much to read or too vague to cope with. The first one mentioned is the longest at four pages, 1,400 words—but it’s chock-full of good suggestions. “Hold new technologies up to the light of your mission and priorities.” “Don’t bet the farm on things you can’t control.” “All things being equal, open is better than proprietary”—a sentiment I agree with 100% *given the first clause*. “Neither an early adopter nor a latecomer be.” “Technology with market share beats better technology.” And so on... Some candidates for Tennant’s Tenets, some not-so-obvious truisms, some that we tend to forget. Farkas’ “buy in” guide is also full of excellent brief points, from “do not decide things unilaterally” to “don’t rush it.”

I don’t mean to slight the others. Without becoming a fanboy, I’ll say the batting average is impressive, and that goes for the executive briefings as well. (RLG is probably the only nonprofit among the founding members of The Unicode Consortium, and Joan Aliprand, a longtime friend and RLG colleague, worked hard for quite a few years to see Unicode to completion; that wasn’t relevant for the executive summary.)

Most posts are too terse to mention here. Besides, you should read them directly—either as they emerge or when you check your TechEssence bookmark.

### Here’s the Plan...

In one of a semi-related series of brouhahas and ker-fuffles, I noted that maybe I need a break. I think that’s true. The summer’s coming, and based on past readership figures, it’s not just me who needs a break: Many of you lighten up on “serious” literature as well.

Here’s the plan:

- The June issue should come out some time in late May, with “Copyright: Finding a Balance” as a major theme.
- The July issue should, no surprise vacations or disasters and the creeks don’t rise, come out just before ALA—with “Finding a Balance 2: The Library Angle” as a major theme.
- If all goes as planned, with lots of summer time spent reading, relaxing, going on short

trips, organizing music, and all that, the August issue will be one most readers can skip: A special issue about *C&I* typography and design, probably yielding a fairly large PDF for a small issue. (“Compare and contrast” does that when you’re embedding typefaces.)

- Things will get back to “normal” with the September issue, out in late August. If you remember last September’s *C&I*, you can predict the planned major theme for the September issue. Maybe.

Given that “plan” and “*C&I*” in the same sentence is somewhat oxymoronic, this may be a good opportunity to save this page and see just how bad I am at short-range planning.

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## Library Access to Scholarship

It’s been too long since the last installment—partly because of special issues, partly because others are covering this area so well, including the fairly new blog noted below. It may also be time for another overview essay, placing these pieces and my own perspective in the context of open access and similar issues. That essay makes sense as a separate. For now, it’s time to catch up on items small and large.

### Notes and Announcements

A team of librarians from several Canadian universities and NYU has started *OA Librarian*, [oalibrarian.blogspot.com](http://oalibrarian.blogspot.com), “Open Access resources for librarians.” The founding group includes Heather Morrison, Marcus Banks, Lesley Perkins and Andrew Waller. Quoting from the introductory post (November 9, 2005):

The blog is designed to gather together major search sources for freely available information in library and information science. See the top right hand corner of the blog, which features links to the DOAJ LIS journal collection—52 titles as of today, along with links to E-LIS and D-LIST, as well as key advocacy resources particularly relevant to libraries and librarians. The result is a combined pathfinder / news resource blog. The idea is to bookmark the page, for handy reference particularly to the free resources, a tool which will become of greater importance as the OA resources grow.

Since the founding, four more bloggers have joined the team, one from Turkey. This international crew

seems to be posting selectively and thoughtfully. It’s in my Bloglines subscription; it adds another source to complement *DigitalKoans* and *Open Access News*.

- This one’s interesting as something to watch: *The impact of open access on library and information science (a research project)*. It’s a project proposal from Cheryl Knott Malone and Anita Coleman (both at the University of Arizona’s School of Information Resources and Library Science), setting forth a three-year project to try to answer the question, “To what extent does open access improve the impact of an article?” The brief document sets forth the proposed approach, interesting partly because it looks at articles in library science rather than the hard sciences.
- ACRL has announced that *College & Research Libraries* will be freely available after a six-month embargo, with retrospective issues (PDF) available back to 1997. *C&RL* articles are peer reviewed. The press release notes “ACRL supports open access to scholarship as a principle for reform in the system of scholarly communication” and that ACRL encourages author self-archiving of *published* articles in institutional and disciplinary archives. The new provision doesn’t make *C&RL* an OA journal by current definitions, but it’s a step in the right direction. (Where’s *Information Technology and Libraries*, the scholarly journal of my home division? Some articles from March 2004 and before are available online...which is a *long* way from OA.)
- The Council on Library and Information Resources has issued *Acquiring copyright permissions to digitize and provide open access to books*. The 72-page report by Denise Troll Covey can be ordered for \$25 or downloaded for free.
- The *Directory of Open Access Journals* issued a press release January 13, 2006, when the directory reached 2,000 journals. As of this writing, it’s up to 2,182, including 596 journals for which *DOAJ* provides article-level searching. The press release notes that *DOAJ* maintains standards: “during the last 6 months of 2005 50 titles were removed.”
- Hindawi Publishing converted 13 of its subscription-access journals in mathematics to OA on February 22, 2006. “All current and back volumes of these journals are immedi-

ately available free of any subscription or registration barriers on the Hindawi web site” and all new articles are published under the Creative Commons Attribution (“BY”) license. Peter Suber noted that this was the largest bulk conversion of non-OA journals to OA in the history of open access; it brought Hindawi up to 25 OA journals. (Since then, Hindawi has converted at least four more journals.)

- A group of librarians, college administrators, and scholars issued a call to action to preserve online scholarly journals, noting that such journals “could vanish into oblivion should publishers go out of business or face other calamities.” The ACRL Board endorsed that message in February 2006. A *Chronicle of Higher Education* story notes that OhioLINK is archiving some online journals and that six libraries and nine publishers are running a pilot LOCKSS program. The story says a recommendation to demand archival deposit by publishers as a condition of licensing electronic journals “is likely to be controversial.” If that’s true, it’s unfortunate and, one would think, self-defeating.
- An April 6, 2006 *DigitalKoans* post summarizes three open source e-journal management systems, for those wishing to publish new OA journals: HyperJournal, Open Journal Systems, and (in development) DPubS (Digital Publishing System). Earlier, Peter Suber noted a free *platform* hosted by Scholarly Exchange, ([www.scholarlyexchange.org](http://www.scholarlyexchange.org)), using Open Journal Systems software and providing hosting and support financed by “contextually appropriate on-screen advertising.” It’s an interesting concept (a journal can avoid advertising by paying a minimal fee, and so far the ads are typical sidebar “Ads by Google”). As of early April, two journals are using the platform and four others plan to convert to it.
- On April 10, the Public Access Working Group (an advisory panel to NIH) reaffirmed its support for strengthening of the NIH public access policy, calling for the policy to be mandatory and for the maximum embargo to be six months. That is, NIH should *require* that all NIH-funded works be made available (and accessible) in PubMed Central within six months of publication.

- JSTOR noted in April 2006 that Blackwell Publishing was lengthening the “moving wall” for access to past issues of six Blackwell journals, changing four from three years to ten years and two others from five years to ten years. That makes JSTOR’s collections less useful (because less current). I’m sure it will be discussed further. Even three years is a long way from open access (particularly since JSTOR’s not exactly free either), but decisions to make back issues *less* readily available are always disturbing.

## Brief Commentaries

It’s a bit late and wholly unsurprising, but Peter Suber noted on October 26, 2005 that the DC Principles Coalition issued a press release on October 25 on its latest effort to “roll back the NIH public-access policy” (in Suber’s words). The coalition says the proposal “would allow the NIH to bring vast amounts of research findings to the public efficiently and at no cost” by having NIH link directly to publisher websites—after the publisher’s chosen embargo period, of course. “The transparent linking system would make it easier for the public to view more than 1 million research articles and would avert the need to create a new taxpayer-funded publishing infrastructure within the NIH.” Suber notes that the proposal has “repeatedly been offered to the NIH and repeatedly rejected” as it doesn’t provide integrated searching, undercuts NIH’s efforts to shorten embargoes, allows publishers to *lengthen* them at will, and offers no guarantee of continuing free access. I’ve offered my view of the DC Principles before; that (negative) view hasn’t changed.

Another October item emphasizes just how serious the serials pricing crisis really is, and the extent to which it threatens long-term access to scholarship. The University of Pennsylvania cancelled 2,255 journal subscriptions. Despite a \$13.1 million budget for acquisitions (including electronic access), the library can’t keep up with increasing prices. As reported in *The Daily Pennsylvanian*, “officials blame big publishing companies, which they say have raised prices as the companies have bought up academic journals over the last two decades. In 1993, journals accounted for 64 percent of the materials budget. This number has increased to almost 70 percent in the 2005 materials budget.” The article goes on to cite one particularly interesting subscription price, given that most reports talk about journals costing as much

as \$4,000 to \$6,000 a year: *Tetrahedron*, an Elsevier journal, costs \$31,600.

Still catching up from October 2005, T. Scott Plutchak reported on the experience of the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* in moving to open access (which it did in 2001/2002). Some of Plutchak's notes (as excerpted by Peter Suber and further excerpted here):

Between June of 2004 and May of 2005, the number of unique users accessing the *Journal of the Medical Library Association* (JMLA) and its predecessor, the *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* (BMLA), on the National Library of Medicine's PubMed Central (PMC) system averaged just over 20,000 per month. When I first saw these numbers on the PMC administration site, I was astonished. The members of the Medical Library Association (MLA) itself (who we might presume are the main audience of the JMLA) number only about 4,500, and the print run of the journal is generally in the neighborhood of 5,000 copies. It seemed likely to me that the number of unique readers in any given month would be just some fraction of that core audience....I wondered if PMC has some kind of formula that they use to translate the number of IP addresses into number of readers, so I emailed Ed Sequeira, the project coordinator, at PMC. Further astonishment! He...told me that, from surveys that they have done, there are half again as many actual users per IP address.

Thirty thousand unique readers?...I can think of few things more likely to gladden the heart of an editor than this kind of evidence of the reach and impact of the journal on which he lavishes so much time and attention. I have no doubt that we would not be seeing these sorts of numbers if the *JMLA* were not freely available on the Web. From the standpoint of readership and reach, MLA's experiment with open access would appear to be a resounding success. But much of the discussion of open access during the past few years has focused on the risks. What of those?...

So I looked at the revenue and membership figures for the last ten years. I wanted to examine the trend lines and see if anything appeared to change significantly around 2001/02, when the *JMLA* went up on PMC... Subscriptions had been falling for a decade, but the drop from 2002 to 2003 was far more dramatic than the previous declines. The number of subscriptions declined again in 2004, although not as dramatically, but revenue went up slightly, thanks to a modest rate increase. Whether this indicates a trend or not is still too early to say...

Perhaps more worrisome from the standpoint of the long-term health of the association is the impact of an open access journal on the members' willingness to remain members. Here, the results are more encouraging. Total membership has declined during the entire period, but the biggest drop occurred in 2000/01, just before the

PMC debut....To probe the views of members further, I worked up a quick online survey...I asked what degree of impact the *JMLA*'s free availability had had on their decision not to renew their membership. Seventeen respondents fit in that category. Fourteen indicated little to no impact, two were neutral, and one indicated that it had had a major impact. When I asked the current members if the *JMLA*'s free availability would make them more or less likely to renew their membership, 61% indicated that it would have no bearing; but, for 30%, it would make them somewhat to much more likely to renew. On the downside, 5% felt that it would make them much less likely to renew...Other questions in my survey indicated that the free availability would make people much more likely to read articles from the older issues and would make potential authors more likely to submit manuscripts. These, of course, are the things that an editor loves to hear....

Despite what I said near the beginning of this editorial, it is too early to label the experiment an unqualified success. But has the attempt been worth it so far? I look again at the PMC statistics. Twenty to thirty thousand unique users? Has it been worth it? Oh, yes!

As Suber notes, the full editorial ("an exemplary report of a journal OA experiment") includes judicious qualifications on the data. If you read T. Scott's blog ([tscott.typepad.com/tsp/](http://tscott.typepad.com/tsp/)) you'll know to excerpt thought and care.

Moving on to November 2005, the Georgia State University blog on issues in scholarly communication quoted the text of six slides on open access from a presentation by Erik Engstrom, Elsevier's CEO. Engstrom says "Frustration drove desire for new publishing models" and "Transformation is dramatically increasing number of journals accessed, productivity for researchers and reducing effective price per article." He labels open access journals "Author pays" and offers "delayed open access" and self-archiving of manuscripts as other models. He does not appear to admit that OA journals can be anything but "author pays," says such journals represent less than one percent of current articles, that OA journal launches have declined since 2001, and that Springer's Open Choice model only attracted 24 articles in its first year. He asserts that OA inhibits authors in developing countries from submitting articles and that a "major study questioned peer review and editing standards" (that's the ALPSP study; see below). But then there are the beneficent publishers: **Less than 2%** of articles are available via "delayed open access," less than 1% within the first year. As for open archiving, he asserts a "stable 5% of article manuscripts," denying the possibility of any growth in archiving. "Repositories use-

ful in several ways but unlikely to benefit research productivity.” In short, it’s the same-old same-old, just as you’d expect from Elsevier: There’s no real problem, OA doesn’t work, subscriptions provide significant benefits including “improving cost efficiency.” Fairly new CEO, tired old message.

Speaking of Elsevier, Chris Leonard (“Publishing Editor within Elsevier with responsibility for theoretical computer science journals”) runs a blog, *Computing Chris*. A November 21 post suggests “14 steps to the perfect CS journal?” based on Leonard’s discussions with people in the field. The list in general is interesting—but it’s betrayed by the very first one:

1. FREE ACCESS—at least at the point of use. Subscribers access the journal for 1 year, then all articles are available to everyone who wants them?

“At least at the point of use”: That is, as long as enough libraries pony up, their users will have “free” access. When someone who doesn’t have institutional access questioned his terminology, he repeated the standard line: “Free at point-of-use means that you as an end user don’t have to pay. If you are a student or researcher, your institute may subscribe to journals and pay a price for them, but you personally don’t.” He goes on to suggest that a one-year embargo “ensures that libraries get the benefit of subscriptions”!

I’d refer you to the blog itself for the rest of the discussion...but “runs” turns out to be the wrong tense. Leonard left Elsevier four days after that post—and the blog has disappeared entirely.

Heather Morrison comments on “trends in refereed journals/open and toll access” in her *Imaginary journal of poetic economics*. She notes that Ulrich’s includes 1,253 scholarly peer-reviewed open access journals, 5% of the total—and that the largest number of startups was in 2004, not 2001 as claimed in the ALPSP study. DOAJ listed 2,009 OA journals at that point, possibly because Ulrich’s tends to include primarily English-language journals. There’s another list from Jan Sczcepanski with more than 4,700 open access journals—but it’s quite likely that most of those aren’t peer-reviewed. One sidenote: If you look at the start dates for refereed scholarly journals *in general*, “peaked in 2001” appears to be true there as well—although 2004 made a strong comeback after the decline of 2002 and 2003, it’s still lower than 2001.

The March 2, 2006 *SPARC Open Access Newsletter* features “Three gathering storms that could cause collateral damage for open access”: The webcasting treaty, growing opposition to net neutrality, and “the

end of free email.” In each case, Peter Suber provides a few paragraphs as to why these could be threats and offers extensive links. Worth reading directly.

## Clusters and Longer Items

Clusters? Groups of discussions by the same person.

### *Dorothea Salo (Caveat lector)*

Salo’s been writing a series of fascinating, instructive posts relating to her work managing an institutional repository. Her blog is always worth reading, and recently it’s had heavy relevance to access issues. I’m highlighting just a few; it’s worth checking her archives for others.

A March 1, 2006 post, “Registering,” starts out seeming to be about writing styles. Salo hates writing in “formal-publication register” and finds it natural to drop into “blog register,” and boy, can I empathize with that, since I was *never* any good at formal-publication register, even in my books. But she moves beyond that to grump about Stevan Harnad’s attitude, seemingly echoed by Richard Poynder, regarding purity of open access efforts. “Just because OA isn’t the only thing I do doesn’t mean I don’t do OA!” There’s a lot more here, much better read in the original.

Harnad will apparently always believe that self-archiving is The Solution, that it’s inevitable and optimal, that OAI repositories cost almost nothing to set up and run, and that everything else is a distraction. I think Salo’s rejoinder is on the money: “And if self-archiving is such a lovely...solution to everybody’s problems, why isn’t everybody doing it?...The world is more complicated than Harnad would like it to be.”

Salo goes on to note, correctly, that it’s nonsensical to suppose that publishers are handling or should handle article archiving. “Publishers have never been involved with preservation; it’s been a library function as long as there have been libraries.” And she’s certainly right (in my opinion) to assert that shoving librarians (or multipurpose IRs) out of the OA arena can only damage OA, probably severely.

Two days later, Salo offered “Open access outside libraries.” This also has to do with Harnad’s apparent attitude that library-based IRs aren’t the right place to do OA and that OA should instead be done in little departmental repositories.

My first question is this: If faculty cannot even drag themselves to deposit material into IRs where the library has done all the tech work for them up-front, how will they be convinced to start them? It is assuredly technically simple to do, but *the complexity of the technical proc-*

ess is not and has never been the problem. The complexity of the social process is the problem, and I fail to see how Harnad's proposal solves it.

She also notes it's unlikely that departmental repositories would stay "pure" OA repositories for very long. When budgets got tough, departments would see the repositories as content management systems for all sorts of content. Then there's the "100%" problem:

To achieve his stated goal of 100% OA to the peer-reviewed journal literature via departmental repositories, Harnad will have to convince every department and research unit on every college and university campus everywhere containing faculty who publish in the peer-reviewed journal literature to open a repository.

Since IR adoption isn't close to universal among academic libraries (where it would seem to be a natural), that's a tough job. There are also other issues—duplication of effort, for example.

Salo also considers, thoughtfully and in some detail, other ways that OA might work while bypassing librarians, such as state- or countrywide repositories. Such have their own problems.

March 8: "What is an IR for?" It's a careful discussion that I find difficult to summarize. Part of it continues the argument against those who believe that *nothing but peer-reviewed literature* should be held in IRs that contain OA literature, but there's a lot more. **Go read it.**

For now, let's close with "Marketing an IR" (March 18). In this case, she's recommending "a cheap, agile, multifaceted, flexible IR marketing campaign over a single sweated-over Master Communication Plan." That makes a lot of sense: Single messages have a way of failing, and IRs (and OA) are about many different things. (For example, I care about OA as a possible way to improve library ability to purchase books and humanities journals; others don't consider that part of the equation at all.) Here's the end of a short, upbeat post:

Don't bother with long involved planning sessions. Don't bother with marketing committees at first (though later on, it may well help to share information). Brainstorm a page of ideas, pick some to try, and try them. When some don't pan out, pick others. Embrace serendipity. Listen to and act on what people tell you about the IR, and about faculty beliefs and practices.

And have fun! Laugh! I've caught a few people, I firmly believe, just because I enjoy and believe in what I'm doing and it shows when I talk about it.

Maybe *Caveat lector* is another reason I don't feel much pressure to cover open access and related issues in any great depth: It's being done so well elsewhere.

## Jan Velterop at *The Parachute*

*The parachute* is a great title, explained by the motto: "It only works when it is open." Velterop's new position, pushing an expensive form of author-choice OA for one of the immense for-profit journal publishers, makes things trickier, but he's still worth reading.

A February 21 post entitled "Too many papers, too many journals" discusses the ongoing issue of "journal fragmentation." Velterop poses the question as "how much scientific information should be made available, i.e. published?" As posed, it's hard to disagree with his answer: "I think it should be as much as possible. There is no place for 'quantity control' of information." He goes on to note that, in some respects, *not enough* information is being published—e.g., negative results rarely get published (although that may be changing).

But 'information' is not the same as 'amount of articles.' We all know about 'salami-slicing,' when a given amount of information is published in a number of articles, where putting them in just one article would be perfectly reasonable and possible. This is of course a consequence of the 'publish-or-perish' culture that has taken hold of science.

He discusses publish-or-perish and the quest for the highest possible Impact Factor; it's an interesting discussion. Seeking the highest IF creates a "major inefficiency" because it results in too many "speculative submissions" to journals with very high Impact Factors, rather than directly submitting articles to the most appropriate journals. "This in turn has led to overburdening of peer-reviewers, high rejection rates, time-wasting" and other problems.

I take mild issue with the next paragraph, in which Velterop says, "In the modern world, journals are just 'tags,' 'labels' that are attached to articles." That may be true for virtually all STM journals; it has certainly not been true historically for some journals in other fields, where the journal itself is more than the sum of its refereed articles. It trivializes the journal *qua* journal; maybe that's the way the world is going, but I don't have to like it. Velterop also seems to dismiss browsing, which has always been one use of a field's top journals.

A March 8 post poses the question "What is an OA journal?" He notes Thomson Scientific's count of 298 OA journals in the ISI Web of Knowledge and DOAJ's March 8 count of 2,089 such journals.

What, however, are 'Open Access Journals'? Do they exist? What's the definition? Journals that publish OA arti-



cles, or journals that publish *only* OA articles? Same question with regard to Open Access Publishers.

What does exist is publishers who publish journals in which open access articles appear. Not necessarily all the articles in a journal and not necessarily all the journals in a publisher's portfolio.

I guess I'd say there are both OA journals (in which all peer-reviewed articles are OA, although other portions of the journal might be fee-based) and there are journals that publish some OA articles. They're not the same.

While the Bethesda Statement may be correct in saying that OA is a property of individual works, I believe it's worth making distinctions at the journal level as well. I'm not inclined to call a Springer journal an "OA journal" if 1% of the articles in that journal are OA; I'm inclined to call it a journal that publishes some OA articles. And I'm certainly not inclined to call a publisher an "OA publisher" because 2% of their journals are OA, or because 5% of their articles are OA.

Is there a cutoff? I think so. For a given journal, it's simple: If every peer-reviewed article is true OA (available online in final published form *as of the date of publication* and permanently thereafter), the journal is an OA journal regardless of how much other stuff it sells for a subscription price. Otherwise, it's not—which doesn't make it bad, just different. And if more than half of a publisher's journals are OA journals, it's reasonable to call it a "mostly-OA publisher"—but not "an OA publisher" unless they *all* are.

#### *Peter Suber, the SPARC Open Access Newsletter*

It's awfully tempting to quote huge chunks of the January 2, 2006 *SOAN*, where Suber reviews "Open access in 2005" and offers his "Predictions for 2006." This is seriously good stuff—and it would double the length of this section. Here are just a few tastes of each section, sometimes paraphrased (combined, the sections run to 12 pages in all: 6,600 words, **all worth reading**.

- 2005 was the best year to date for university actions in support of OA [with a dozen universities adopting major OA policies or resolutions and two institutions *mandating* OA to their research output].
- 2005 was the year that funding agency OA policies made the transition from proposal to practice.
- OA archiving continued to worry some publishers...[who have] so far been unable to

provide evidence that [fears of undermining subscriptions] are justified.

- OA journals picked up speed [with many examples noted].
- More for-profit businesses demanded that the government *stop* providing open access to publicly-funded information.
- OA is taking to wikis to collect, organize and share information—including "mutant wikis" that add quality control measures.
- Books about OA are starting to emerge.
- Confusion between depositing work in an OA repository and publishing in an OA journal continues; Suber calls this JAM, the Journal-Archive Mixup.
- "2005 was definitely the biggest year to date for book scanning and digitization. In fact, the book-scanning news, even when it was not about OA, swamped the OA news and persuaded many people that it really was about OA." (I'll argue that *some* book digitization is most certainly about OA, namely the OCA.)
- Textbook pricing is becoming visible as another crisis—and OA textbooks might yet emerge.
- "The term 'open access' is starting to seep out into the general scholarly culture that isn't working for OA so much as simply using it." This is good in that scholars are becoming familiar with the concept, not so good if you're trying to stay current on OA news.
- First 2006 prediction: rapid recent growth of OA's several aspects will continue, and 2006 should be a major year for funding agency OA policies.
- "Many of the publishers who agreed to permit postprint archiving had two beliefs, one of which was false at the time (that repositories are ghettos where content is hard to find), and one of which is becoming false (that authors will not archive their postprints in large numbers). The first belief underestimated OAI interoperability and crawling by Google and Yahoo, and the second underestimated the incentives and mandates from funders and universities. Because these beliefs are giving way, some publishers will look for ways to revoke their consent to postprint archiving. If they can't bring themselves to ban postprint

archiving, or to retreat from blanket permission to case-by-case permission, then they may put embargoes on it, as *Nature* has done.”

- “Different publishers will continue to take just about every conceivable position in the landscape, from strong support for OA to strong aversion.”
- People may “get” that fewer than half of OA journals charge “author-side” fees—and that many more subscription journals than OA journals do so.
- The curve of OA public domain books could pass the journal curve this year—and could “reach roughly 100% ages before the journal curve reaches 100%.” (I question whether the journal curve *or* the book curve will ever reach 100%, but that’s me.)
- Open file formats will enter the OA conversation—but Suber believes OA should be format-agnostic.
- “The web and libraries will each be superior to the other in some valuable respects, and only people who deny half of this two-sided truth will be behind the times—and needlessly hampering their research.” (Agreed, as long as it’s seen as a *two-sided* truth—but libraries may also have new and interesting roles in improving web-based research.)

### *The facts about Open Access*

If you care about OA, you’ve already heard about this report from ALPSP, with research by the Kaufman-Wills Group. You can get the entire study or the overview from [www.alpssp.org/publications/pub11.htm](http://www.alpssp.org/publications/pub11.htm). I’ve only read the introduction and overview.

Sally Morris wrote the introduction, so you might not be surprised by the starting sentence: “Discussion of Open Access tends to be strong on rhetoric but short on facts.” Peter Suber, Stevan Harnad and many others would dispute that. Morris admits that “we” (ALPSP) had not realized how long-established some OA journals are, and that the study “dispel[s] the notion that Open Access journals do not carry out peer review of copy-editing”—a notion that, as far as I know, has only been suggested by publishers and those wholly ignorant of OA journals. Morris admits to surprise at “how few of the Open Access journals raise any author-side charges at all;...author charges are more common...among subscription journals.”

But then there’s this: “Is Open Access publishing a financially viable model? It is impossible to draw any firm conclusions, of course. However, from the evidence we have collected this seems by no mean certain.” The evidence is that a *majority* of OA journals are covering their costs. Consider the percentage of restaurants that *never* cover costs (and shut down): Does that mean that restaurants are not *as a class* financially viable?

The report itself includes some wording that suggests anti-OA bias. “Some [individuals] *feared* that the growth rate of Full Open Access journals signified the demise of Subscription Access journals.” [“Full Open Access” is ALPSP’s synonym for OA journals, as opposed to those that make a few articles available or make them available after an embargo period, which ALPSP would like us to think of as “Optional Open Access” or “Delayed Open Access.”] In looking at DOAJ titles, “it was apparent that a good percentage of journals were published by a small number of publishers”—very much like commercial journals!

Table 3, contrasting “general characteristics” of “Full” Open Access vs. “Other journal cohorts,” is charming (all emphases in this paragraph added). OA journals are “Relatively new, established within the last decade” (frequently but not always true, and literally true for only half of those surveyed) while “Other journal cohorts” were “Established 40 years ago” (one of those meaningless averages). Here’s the “Publisher” comparison: On one side, “*Self-published* by a non-profit organization, academic department, or individual”; on the other, “*Published* by a non-profit association, or perhaps a commercial publisher.” “Self-published” is a loaded term, particularly within academia; I fail to see how an organization-based OA journal is any more or less “self-published” than a subscription journal. Also, “perhaps” certainly understates the significance of for-profit publishers in the non-OA field. (Actually, the summary is simply *wrong*. The next page says “the majority (55%) of the Full Open Access journals responding were published by commercial firms.” The writers get around this by excluding the two big commercial OA publishers.)

There’s a lot more. The first conclusion is as you’d expect: Despite the fact that most OA journals had upward-trending revenues, that over 90% met or exceeded the expectations of the publishers, and that most of them were at least break-even, “It is too early to tell whether Full Open Access is a viable business

model.” Third: “Peer review and copy-editing may be less rigorous with Full Open Access journals.”

A *Forbes.com* report on this study highlighted that first question: “But a new study questions whether many of these ‘open-access’ journals will manage to survive.” *The Scientist’s* report highlighted “concerns about peer review”—and Sally Morris managed to toughen her stance: “What they [BMC] call peer review is not doing what peer review is supposed to do.” (Morris also asserted, in the study’s introduction and elsewhere, that it is *unlikely to be the case* that OA journals will “do better over time,” unlike subscription journals, although there’s no clear evidence for this OA-bashing statement.) It is worth noting that both reports cite assertions from OA advocates that the ALPSP report is one-sided.

Later, BioMed Central [BMC] responded to the study, saying in part:

The two most serious problems with the report are that it inaccurately describes the peer review process operated by BioMed Central’s journals, and it also draws unjustified conclusions concerning the long-term sustainability of open access journals. The overview of the report incorrectly states that BioMed Central does not operate external peer review on most of its journals. In fact, all of BioMed Central’s journals operate full peer review using external peer reviewers...the BioMed Central/ISP group of journals is reported to offer online manuscript submission on a lower percentage of journals than other journal groups. The report picks up on this as a surprising finding, suggesting implicitly that open access journals are lagging behind in this regard. In fact, BioMed Central offers online submission of manuscripts on every one of its journals. Not only that, but BioMed Central’s manuscript submission system is widely praised by authors, many of whom tell us that it is the best online submission system they have used...

Since BMC is specifically cited as one using internal review, the publisher’s denial does raise questions about the report.

Sally Morris also penned a “Personal View” in the January 2006 *Learned Publishing*, “When is a journal not a journal? A closer look at the DOAJ.” Her study makes much of the apparent fact that OA journals publish fewer articles (on average) than subscription journals, although the relevance of this fact is unclear. This study cites the possibly-true but probably-irrelevant fact that the number of new entries into DOAJ peaked in 2001 (then went down significantly in a couple of slump years, and has since rebounded to near-2001 levels, and might pass those levels this year). Morris may be right that some OA journals

“have published far fewer articles than would be acceptable to subscribers under the traditional model,” but then, they aren’t operating under the traditional model. There’s nothing wrong with an online-only journal that’s freely available publishing a few select papers each year; it’s much more problematic when an expensive journal does lots of “combined issues” and otherwise fails to deliver value for money.

### *Parallel universes: open access and open source*

This article by Glyn Moody, published February 22, 2006 on LWN.net, “Your Linux info source,” is an oddity—drawing parallels and distinctions between OA and open source software from a perspective that seems to suggest that open source software has won over commercial software.

Moody doesn’t downplay the importance of OA: “At stake is nothing less than control of academia’s treasure-house of knowledge.” Moody calls Stevan Harnad OA’s “visionary—the RMS figure” (open source people presumably *know* who RMS is; those initials, presumably those of Richard Stallman, are never expanded in the three-page article). We’re told “open peer commentary” as a form of peer review is “routine today,” which may surprise journal editors.

The article has problems. “The first open access magazine publisher [BMC]...appeared in 1999.” That can only be true based on an unusual reading of “publisher,” since born-OA journals precede that date by a full decade (and BMC wouldn’t call its publications “magazines”). Moody says that OA journals “need” page charges “in order to provide the content free to readers,” true for a minority of OA journals, and says the charge is “typically \$1000 per article.” One commenter manages to turn this into \$1,000 *per page* and see it as a submission charge, not a publication charge; another comment seemed to place this mistake in the article itself (and, for all I know, the article could have been corrected invisibly). One knowledgeable commenter notes that Harnad “fiercely and insistently resists the idea of any similarity” between OA and open source software.

### *Where is the Open Access Foundation?*

It’s only a blog post (March 16, 2006 on Richard Poynder’s *Open and shut?*)—but it’s 3,700 words not including comments, making it article-length by any standard. Poynder believes OA needs a proper organization to make sure definitions stay consistent and the like. He points out the confusion being caused by sloppy (self-serving?) statements from journal pub-

lishers—e.g., that *Biochemical Journal* is OA because raw manuscripts are posted on acceptance (although published versions have a six-month embargo).

Poynder goes on to discuss “what is an OA journal?” at some length, and gently raises questions about Jan Velterop’s agenda as Springer’s Director of Open Access. He notes various attempts to redefine OA. It’s an interesting and careful treatment.

### *The state of the large publisher bundle*

This April 2006 article in *ARL Bimonthly Report* 245 gives findings from an ARL member survey taken in November and December 2005. Most ARL libraries (89 of 123) responded; 93% of those have licensed bundles with at least one of the five largest journal publishers, and on average they have bundles with three of the five. (Only 21% of the respondents have Taylor and Francis bundles; a surprising 7%—six ARL libraries—have *no* such bundles.)

The report offers some of the reasons for bundles; for 114 of the 283 contracts, “alternative non-bundled forms of access to the content were prohibitively expensive.” Remember that ARL represents the largest and generally best-funded universities in North America. To quote the study, “This suggests that libraries may be making the best of a bad situation.”

Do libraries save money by abandoning the print versions of bundled journals? In 62% of the responses, savings were less than 10%.

There’s more here. **Worth reading.**

### *Surveying the e-journal preservation landscape*

Another article in the same *ARL Bimonthly Report*, by Cornell’s Anne R. Kenney, reports on an ongoing “landscape analysis for preserving e-journals.” The article notes ten initiatives, including LOCKSS and CLOCKSS but also a number of less well-known initiatives. The group involved has developed a set of key concerns based on interviews with library directors and is now developing a survey of the archiving initiatives. A final report is expected this August.

This research is important work (as are the initiatives); the Cornell group appears superbly qualified to carry it out and produce useful results. Definitely worth following—and this relatively brief article will introduce you to some digital archiving initiatives you may not have heard of.

### *Open Access and libraries*

That’s the title of Charles W. Bailey, Jr.’s introduction to OA, available as a preprint and to be published in *Electronic Resources Librarians: The Human Element of*

*the Digital Information Age*. A somewhat similar and shorter piece, “What is Open Access?” is also available as a preprint; that piece will appear in *Open Access: Key Strategic, Technical and Economic Aspects*.

Both offer clear overviews of OA—the key statements (the “three Bs” from Bethesda, Berlin, and Budapest), what it is, what else might grow out of it, strategies, journals, repositories, and why it matters. It’s clearly written, easy to read, well-documented, and well thought out.

I recommend the longer article; it goes into more detail on varieties of journals and possible roles for libraries in supporting OA. I certainly prefer Bailey’s “color code” for journals (excerpted and paraphrased here) over ALPSP’s varieties of “open access”:

- Open Access journals (green)—those that meet all OA criteria including Creative Commons’ Attribution licenses.
- Free Access journals (cyan)—ones where all articles are freely available, but that don’t require the Attribution license. (So, for example, if *C&I* was scholarly, it would fall in the “cyan” category.)
- Embargoed Access journals (yellow)—ones where all articles *eventually* become available.
- Partial Access journals (orange)—ones where *some* articles are freely available.
- Restricted Access journals (red)—ones with *no* free access to journals.

Bailey uses ALA divisional journals as examples of the last two cases; in one case (Partial Access), *C&RL* has now shifted to “yellow,” but in the other case (Restricted Access), it would be nice if publicity caused LAMA (and LITA) to rethink their practices.

### *Journals in the time of Google*

Lee C. Van Orsdel and Kathleen Born wrote this April 15, 2006 *Library Journal* overview of some events in the world of academic journals, appearing with *LJ*’s Periodical Price Survey. It’s a good once-over-lightly, with a number of notes on open access issues. Here’s a paragraph that seems worth repeating in full:

Journal prices still have the power to shock. In January, the editor of *Journal of Economic Studies*, an Emerald Press title, resigned when he realized that his journal’s \$9,859 sticker price was wholly out of line both with the market and with his own sensibilities. The title is not indexed in Social Sciences Citation Index, yet it cost around three times as much as the next most expensive journal in the field. The energy for dealing with a broken market, however, seems to be shifting toward institutional repositories and OA publishing models and

away from the futile hope that high-priced publishers will come to their senses and reduce journal prices.

## Perspective

# You Just Can't Comprehend

It would be as tiresome to note every outrageous opinion or price point in *Stereophile* as it would be to note every outrageous comment by John Dvorak or carp over every evangelical universalism from those given to evangelism. Life is too short.

Still, once in a while the urge can't be suppressed. An op-ed by Jason Victor Serinus in the March 2006 *Stereophile*, "The mystery of music," falls into that category. Technically, it's about the debate between objectivists and subjectivists among audiophiles—specifically, whether reviewers in high-end audio magazines *really* hear the differences they claim to hear. As expected in such commentaries, Serinus paints those on "the other side" in absolute terms—"assertions that aftermarket power cables can't possibly make a difference or that amplifiers all sound alike." I've seen very few assertions that "all amplifiers sound alike" (an absurd statement, given how massively and possibly euphonically some tube amplifiers distort sound) although there are certainly people who think the whole cable mystique is overrated.

But Serinus has *the answer*. It's not that the differences aren't real. It can't possibly be that reviewers want to hear differences, and so hear them. Nope. Here's the answer, stated as a question: "Is it possible that those who claim that some of us cannot possibly hear what we are hearing themselves lack the facility to comprehend what we're hearing in the first place?"

As stated, that's doubtless true *for some doubters in some situations*. Some people either don't hear the difference between a boombox and a well-configured stereo system or, more likely, don't care about the difference. If you love the sound of your iPod and have never *tried* a better pair of earbuds or headphones than the underperforming ones Apple supplies, you may fall into one of these categories. So too if you can't hear the difference between 128K MP3 and CD sound (or losslessly-compressed sound, or even 320K MP3) on a range of music played over decent equipment. ("Decent equipment" certainly includes some iPod models using better headphones or feeding decent stereo systems.) There's nothing wrong with that.

If you enjoy the music, don't find that you tire rapidly of the underperforming sound, and don't care about the subtleties of the sound, who's hurt?

But Serinus goes further: He suggests these people "can't remember sounds" and quotes Virgil Thomson asserting that music is "comprehensible only to persons who can remember sounds." Thomson comes off as quite the snob in that statement, seeming to suggest that those who "comprehend" music are a small secret society, "completely impenetrable by outsiders." Serinus? He goes on to say, "For some people, music registers only as rhythm and/or sensation." He puts down those who prefer home theatre to arias and suggests that anyone who "prefers hip-hop to Handel" most surely wouldn't appreciate high-quality equipment, tossing in a touch of snobbery here as well. (A message for Serinus on another sneering comparison: Although I'm not one of them, there are people with exquisite taste who *legitimately* prefer Snapple to champagne, if only because they're alcohol-intolerant or recovering alcoholics.)

I can remember sounds and music only too well. I haven't heard Billy Joel's *The Stranger* in at least 20 years, since we moved from LPs to CDs—but I can hear the whistling-and-piano instrumental that opens and closes the LP as clearly as if it was playing now. (I can also, in some cases, reorchestrate a piece in my mind. I'd probably never be a composer, but I might have been an arranger in some other lifetime and with more musical talent.) I can hear differences between some components and others, sometimes easily, sometimes with more effort. Admittedly, my hearing isn't great at high frequencies, but my discrimination's reasonably good. If money, space and time were no object, I'd probably have a moderately expensive sound system—chosen by audition *and* measurement.

I have *no doubt* that some cables make some difference in some situations. I have no doubt that there are real differences legitimately audible to some listeners that can't be measured using current measuring techniques. I also have no doubt whatsoever that some of the huge, unmistakable, you'd-have-to-be-deaf-not-to-hear them differences touted in some of the high-end magazines exist only in the minds of the reviewers: They're there because the manufacturer's a good friend, the equipment is particularly shiny, or...

I find Serinus' essay offensive and specious. It precludes arguments over whether differences are truly audible or are there because people want them to be there: "You just don't comprehend music or

sound properly.” That’s different from the golden-ear argument: Some people naturally hear differences others don’t, you can train yourself to hear smaller differences—and only the “golden-eared” few will appreciate the best equipment. That argument is still subject to verification through *some* form of blind testing. But many reviewers deny that blind testing can have *any* role in audiophilia, using known and real problems with double-blind real-time testing as a basis to condemn any effort to reduce pure subjectivity.

“You just don’t understand” is a good way to cut off debate of any sort. In the debates Serinus is dealing with, it’s almost certainly spurious: The *audiophiles* who question certain differences are unlikely to be people who can’t remember music or sound. But hey, if dismissing whole classes of people works, why not dismiss subcategories? These people don’t hear *well enough*, they’re not musical *enough*.

I believe people should do and believe whatever makes them happy, as long as it doesn’t injure other people, use an unseemly amount of natural resources or contribute to pollution and global warming, or otherwise damage others and the planet. I find it sad (if only too natural) that people achieve happiness by sneering at others; thus, this essay.

### *On the other hand...*

It may be useful to contrast Serinus’ dismissive op-ed with “Truth vs. beauty: A tale of two transports,” pages 57-60 in the same *Stereophile*. Here, Laurence A. Borden discusses two moderately high-end CD transports (players, if you prefer), a CEC TL1-x and a modified Sony CDP X707ES. He’s used the CEC for years as his reference transport—and found the Sony “starkly different” in its sonic presentation:

The belt-driven CEC’s strength is a lush midrange associated with somewhat diminished frequency extremes. Despite these errors of omission, it is a very seductive presentation. In contrast, the Sony has more treble and bass energy, places more emphasis on the transient attack of notes, and gives the impression of the music being more brightly illuminated.

If you think that’s florid writing, you haven’t read high-end stereo magazines: This is actually pretty precise by audio-magazine standards and states differences that I suspect trained listeners using really good equipment and recordings would probably hear.

The discussion’s fascinating, if sometimes a little odd. Borden recognizes that some audiophiles primarily seek accuracy of reproduction, while others “apparently have little interest in these aspects and

instead seek nothing more—or less—than a romantic and pleasant sound.” In other words, some want accurate *reproducers*, true to what’s in the recording, while others want their equipment to *make* pretty music. The more Borden listened, the more he concluded that the CEC “seems more about beauty, the modified Sony more about truth.”

Borden believes all playback systems are ultimately flawed; that’s not an unreasonable assertion. Given that, it’s not *unreasonable* to prefer one kind of flaw to another. (The “tube vs. transistor” arguments regarding amplifiers tend to be beauty-vs.-truth as well, except that tube lovers don’t like to put it that way. Borden notes that solid-state amplifiers may not be so much flawed themselves as a little too ruthless in uncovering flaws elsewhere in a stereo system.)

Borden isn’t coming down on one side or the other. “It is important to keep in mind that no one way is correct in the absolute sense, and we should all respect others’ opinions and approaches.”

If you care about these things and don’t regularly read *Stereophile*, I recommend Borden’s essay. The final sentence is interesting, given that Borden clearly liked the CEC transport a lot (or would not have been using it as a reference): “By the way, I prefer the modified Sony.”

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## Masthead

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