Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large
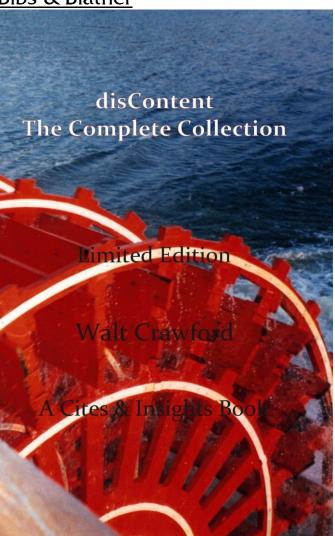## Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Bibs & Blather

disContent: The Complete Collection

The first limited edition casebound Cites & Insights Book is now available—and will disappear either on March 1, 2011 or when 100 copies have been sold.

disContent: The Complete Collection brings together 73 "disContent" columns I wrote for EContent Magazine from 2001 through 2009. These columns offer an amateur's views on econtent, context, media, borgs and more. Each includes a postscript offering my contemporary view of the column or bringing it up to date.

I regard these columns as some of my best short-form writing. Most are as relevant today as they were when I wrote them. On the other hand, a few are mildly embarrassing at this remove.

Most of you probably haven't read these columns, since the EContent reader base is mostly in the econtent industries, not libraries. A few early columns appeared in Cites & Insights in its own early years. You'll find the last "disContent" column at the end of this issue's primary essay, and I may reprint a few of the columns in later issues—but certainly not the lesser gems and the ones where I got it wrong! For those, you need this limited edition.

Inside This Issue

The book is 314 pages long, very lightly indexed and hardbound, the first and possibly only hardbound (casebound) Cites & Insights book. Page size is 6x9"; the bound size is a little larger. If there's enough interest, I may publish a set of the 37 "best" columns as a trade paperback, but that won't happen before April 2011 (and may not happen at all). In any case, this limited edition (signed on the title page) is the only place the complete set, with updates, will appear. The price is $50.

What's in the collection? Here are some column titles:

> Keeping the Faith: Playing Fair with your Visitors
> Survey Says…Or Does It? [Fun with Statistics]
> Who Do You Trust?

I think it's well worth the $50—and purchases of this limited edition will help support ongoing research and writing. You'll find it at lulu.com/product/13500200/. Do be aware that it takes longer to produce casebound books, typically five to seven business days.

The Liblog Landscape 2007-2010

This issue also includes a draft chapter from *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2010*, as universal a study of English-language liblogs as I could manage (and almost certainly the largest detailed study of blogs in any field).

That chapter is Chapter 2, explaining methods and metrics and including a few secondary metrics. If all goes as planned, Chapter 3 will appear in the next issue, Chapter 4 in the issue after that...and so on. I'm guessing the book itself will appear in December 2010 or January 2011. Draft chapters that appear in *C&I* have smaller graphs and may be lacking columns in some tables, in both cases because the column width in *C&I* is narrower than the text block width in the book.

Where's Chapter 1? Only in the book—and it's not written yet, as I'll be putting it together from some of the highlights throughout other chapters (and possibly some new bits of information and conclusions).

As for graphs, I plan to do something to make them more viewable for book buyers: Provide a downloadable/printable PDF containing *only* the graphs (with no commentary), on 8.5x11" pages with narrower print margins so as to display as much detail as possible in the graphs. For some graphs, the difference is dramatic.

The Future of *Cites & Insights*

Rather than another expression of uncertainty about The Future (given that I still don't have a sponsor), I'll stick with a short-term reality.

To wit, *this is not quite the end of Volume 10*. It's the last regular issue, but there will be a volume title page and index, probably in late November or early December—and, I suspect, a paperback printed volume shortly thereafter. It would be wonderful if some library school libraries were buying the bound volumes; it's clear that they're not. I have the naïve hope that a few might be binding their own copies, so the index will continue to have a volume title sheet (front and back) preceding the index itself. Or, rather, the indexes—as usual, there will be one for articles quoted, one for everything else.

Perspective

Futurism and Deathwatches

Long-time readers may think I despise futurism. That's not quite true. Those who believe I despise deathwatches—assertions that "X is dead"—are closer to the truth. In both related cases (after all, any deathwatch is an assertion about the future), there's a complexity of motives and methods, and I only despise some of them.

We need to think about the future. We need to plan for a plausible range of futures—that's what planning is all about. Some self-labeled futurists specialize in building ranges of *desired* futures and seeing what it would take to improve the chances of reaching those futures. That's admirable, useful, necessary. Some futurists specialize in building sets of *possible* futures, not necessarily desired ones. If that's done in order to explain how things could play out, what might help to move toward one possibility rather than another, it's also admirable.

Problems arise with the kind of futurism that gets the publicity and yields the books I love to make fun of 10 or 15 years after they're published. This kind of futurism asserts the ability to *predict* the future, and it's "the future," not "one of many

possible futures." It's almost always a less complex future than the present and the predictions frequently include the magic word "inevitable." Sure, it's possible to make some narrow, partial, reasonable-probability short-term and medium-term projections—but if it was plausible for the best experts to make broader predictions, you could point to some 20-year-old sets of predictions that actually worked out. I haven't seen any such sets, even if you define "worked out" as "appreciably better than flipping a coin."

That sort of futurism, which is most of what we see in the press, bothers me a lot—the more so because futurists are rarely, if ever, held accountable for their manifest failings. Did *Being Digital* work out the way Negroponte asserted? Not at all—but Negroponte is still regarded as a guru whose words are always worth following.

I've come to despise futurism when it's used as a handy way to dismiss opinions and preferences, when it's used to dumb down the real world into claptrap clichés such as "the digital future" (where there's an implicit "all-" before "digital"), when it becomes a world-weary way to stop thinking.

Deathwatches are a particularly noxious form of dumbed-down futurism. When you proclaim that "X is dead" or "X is dying" you are explicitly telling people who prefer X that they're wrong and irrelevant, that the future is some great monolithic steamroller and their preferences are doomed to be part of the pavement. Far too frequently, deathwatches are expressions of arrogance and an ugly form of claimed superiority, especially when phrased as "X *must* die" or with the addition "and good riddance."

But that's not always the case...although when it's not, thoughtful writers will substitute some nuanced alternative to "X is dead." Tell me "X appears to be diminishing" and I'll ask for evidence. Tell me "X may, in the future, not be viable for these reasons" and I'll read the reasons carefully and thoughtfully. In both cases, you're offering an argument and presumably providing evidence— and that's quite different from dismissing X as "dead" *because you say so*. Or, perhaps worse, giving us lists of things that "must die" because you, and the truly important people who are exactly like you, think that alternatives should be used.

Commentaries that X appears to be replacing Y? That's quite a different thing, at least if it's done

without an "...and Y really should disappear" undertone. If there are specific reasons that Y should disappear, other than "it's not NEW" or "it's not what I like" or "it's not sufficiently digital," that's a different issue—but those reasons should be stated. I do some of that myself, and it's an important part of journalism and nonfiction writing in general. I'm not arguing that people shouldn't draw comparisons and note when things seem to be declining and why. I'm arguing that people shouldn't oversimplify, gloat, and make assumptions based on universalizing from their own preferences or deciding that the underprivileged or those with limited discretionary funds simply don't matter.

That's enough overall philosophizing (or ranting, if you prefer). In February 2010 (*Cites & Insights* 10:2), I devoted half an issue to a T&QT PERSPECTIVE, TRENDS AND FORECASTS. It might be interesting to go back to that issue in a few years, since it's just chock full of offensive deathwatching and "everyone else is like me" futures. I omitted some pieces back then because there wasn't room. This essay picks up those items and adds newer items—although I've been avoiding tagging most deathwatch and futurist items because I find them so aggravating and because commenting on them may be a waste of time. In that issue, I noted the final "disContent" column about deathwatches and that I couldn't reprint the column at that point. The period of exclusivity for *EContent* has long since passed and the final "disContent" column appears at the end of this Perspective. (Expect to see other "disContent" columns in some future issues—and, as announced on Page 1, there's now a limited edition collection of them.)

Futures Past

Items that follow are in no particular order other than (generally) chronological. They are mostly items that had been flagged for the February 2010 perspective and didn't fit.

Change or Die
The subtitle on this June 25, 2009 *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece by Jeffrey R. Young is "Scholarly E-Mail Lists, Once Vibrant, Fight for Relevance." Young quotes T. Mills Kelly at George Mason University saying "the time of scholarly e-mail lists has passed, meaningful posts slowing to a trickle as professors migrate to blogs, wikis, Twitter, and social networks like Facebook."

Maybe I should mention that Kelly is "associate director at the Center for History and New Media" and made that argument on his blog—mentioning it again on "the technology podcast he hosts with two colleagues."

When Young looks at some large mail lists (Listserv® is still a trademark for one particular list system) and says they show "signs of enduring life and adaptation to the modern world," Kelly is "not swayed." He used to participate in some mail lists, but one shut down and others aren't doing well. Here comes the bad futurism, the "I don't, so nobody should" argument:

> "As more and more people become comfortable with blogs and Twitter, e-mail lists will become increasingly irrelevant," he said. "They're just a much less dynamic form of communication."

Blogs and twitter. *Blogs* as the future of scholarly discussion? Really?

When Young asked about this *on his Twitter feed*, he got lots of agreement. Thesis: Those who *love* Twitter will tend to dislike email. Sounds right to me. And *CHE* editors were ready to title the piece "Death of the E-Mail List," deathwatch at its finest and most typical.

> But then a surprising thing happened. I started to hear passionate defenses of listservs from other people in my digital network, even those who are just as plugged in to the latest trends.

Young was still asking the question *only to those who are social networking participants*, but even by broadening it to Facebook he got lots of responses saying lists are still useful, some even growing. Some have fewer messages, and that's not necessarily a bad thing. Some have disappeared: That's going to happen, no matter what the medium. (Seen any blogs go silent lately? How are your ever-growing networks of Second Lifers doing?)

Lists have changed. They're not as dominant today as they were in, say, 1999: How could they be? They're used for different purposes. Much of the ephemeral traffic has moved to Twitter, particularly for topics where 140 characters is all there is to say. But "less dominant" is one thing; "irrelevant" is quite another. I regard email lists as a lot less useful and central than they were a decade ago; that doesn't make them irrelevant or dying. I like Young's closing paragraph—except that the "did" in the first sentence should be a "do," since radio hasn't gone anywhere:

Perhaps e-mail lists will occupy a space like radios did in the television age, sticking around but fading to the background. Although people are fond of declaring the death of e-mail in general, it remains a key tool that just about everyone opens every day. As long as that's true, the trusty e-mail list will be valuable to scholars of all stripes.

Don't You Know It's the End of the World...

Ah, the sixties, what memories. No, this was "How is America Going to End?" by Josh Levin, appearing August 3, 2009 in *Slate*—subtitled "The world's leading futurologists have four theories." The world's leading futurologists? Based on what—track records?

The Global Business Network "answers the same question for all its corporate and government clients: *What happens next?*" Wow. You hire GBN and you get *the answer?* I'm impressed. The article goes on to quote one GBN hotshot, Peter Schwartz, saying scenario planning "brings rigor to the inevitably imprecise art of forecasting." Except that if you're providing a *range* of scenarios, you're not answering the question, you're providing a range of speculative possibilities.

This article is based on a session during which these forecasters plotted scenarios in which the U.S. could *end* in the next century. Well, OK: A set of possible scenarios is interesting and almost certainly worthwhile. Indeed, in a 1991 book about scenario planning, Schwartz says professional forecasters (futurists) are *not* oracles—that they do not predict the future. (So they tell you "what happens next" without predicting the future? That's a neat trick.)

What do these futurists come up with for the end of the U.S. by 2109? Schwartz offers racial war as one idea. The group comes up with four scenarios they consider plausible:

- **Collapse**: The country falls apart after a series of catastrophes—so far apart that the national government becomes irrelevant.
- **Friendly breakup**: We decide that the U.S. is unmanageable and break it up into smaller parts—you know, like the USSR?
- **Global governance**: That's right, world government—and another *Slate* contributor believes that we'll either have global governance or chaos.
- **Global conquest**: Some nation conquers the U.S. and the rest of the world.

The caveat: Schwartz and, apparently, the other futurists believe that the most likely scenario is "that the city of Washington will still be a capital of a nation-state on this continent." In other words, all four scenarios are improbable, with Global Conquest the least likely of all.

The article cites a December 2008 item in the *Wall Street Journal* where a Russian academic (Igor Panarin) is quoted as believing that the U.S. would *dissolve* in 2010: A future he's been predicting for more than a decade and the Russian state media were apparently taking seriously in December 2008. Here's what this futurist actually predicted: mass immigration, economic decline and "moral degradation" would trigger a civil war in the fall of 2009, the collapse of the dollar, and the breakup of the U.S. in June or July 2010 into six pieces, with Alaska reverting to Russian control. According to this professor, using classified data, California (and Oregon, Washington, Arizona, etc.) should now be part of China, Texas and the South part of Mexico, New York and New England part of the European Union and the Midwest and Plains states part of Canada. Maybe this all happened a few months ago and we just missed it?

Panarin has the right attitude for a Bad Futurist. When somebody asked White House spokesperson Dana Perino about his prediction, at a December 2008 news conference, she responded "I'll have to decline to comment"—as the article says, "amid much laughter." Panino's reaction? "The way the answer was phrased was an indication that my views are being listened to very carefully." *Sure* it was.

Most of this article is about Good Futurism—preparing possible scenarios, providing the argumentation for them and considering implications about steps to be taken. The article links to a "Choose Your Own Apocalypse" tool—including Levin's collection of "144 potential causes of America's future death." Levin posted another "How Is America Going to End" story (August 7, 2009: www.slate.com/id/2224425/device/html40/workarea/3/) with "the apocalypse you chose." More than 60,000 readers selected their Fave Five, dystopian futures that seemed most likely—call it crowdfuturism, if you like. The five most popular paths to our demise?

➢ **Loose Nukes**: Insurgents take control of nuclear weapons in Pakistan or Russia and wipe out the U.S.

➢ **Peak Oil**: As oil production declines, alternative energy sources can't maintain our lifestyle (and so we dissolve the country? really?)—a long-time "hobbyhorse" of various prophets.
➢ **Antibiotic Resistance**: Superbacteria wipe us out.
➢ **China Unloads U.S. Treasurys**: Thus bankrupting the country and wiping out the national government.
➢ **Israel-Arab War**: Erupts and becomes so major that it destroys the U.S.

The most popular *cluster* (since people could choose up to five scenarios) combined the first four above with "peak water," in which we no longer have adequate water. Just to keep life interesting, *Slate* started a Choose Your Own Apocalypse social network—but that link yields an empty page on my browser. I guess it dissolved along with the U.S.?

Ten Technology "Game Changers" for 2010

Here's an example of a different sort of near-term futurism, one that does not cause my bile to rise. I picked this item up from David Booker on *The Centered Librarian*, posted January 7, 2010, but it's based on a *TechCrunch* article by Eric Schonfeld—with, unfortunately, a link to *TechCrunch* as a whole rather than the individual item.

Based only on Booker's summary and comments, this appears to be a list of things that *could be important* in 2010—which is quite different than Stating The Future. I might argue with details, but that's argument—I don't see many flat-out predictions here. Maybe I would if I was ready to page through search results to find the original article, but I'm too lazy to do that (it wasn't on the first page and I don't see date-organized archives at *TechCrunch*).

The ten? Tablets, geolocation, realtime search, Chrome OS, HTML5, mobile video, augmented reality, mobile transactions, Android, and "social CRM"—that is, co-opting social networks for business purposes. This late in the year, it's easy to suggest that Chrome OS isn't going to be *that* important in 2010, but overall, I suspect these are mostly reasonable suggestions.

3D TV: Why you'll (someday) own one whether you like it or not

This, on the other hand, is nonsense—from a source I expect better of, namely *ars technica*

(written by Jon Stokes on January 12, 2010). Stokes notes that the big push for 3DTV at CES in January 2010 was met with yawns. But, Stokes says, *it doesn't matter*. "Because of the specific approach that the industry has settled on, consumers don't have to be bowled over for 3D TV to wind up in every living room. Here's a look at the current state of 3D TV, and at why it's coming to a screen near you whether you like it or not."

First, Stokes says, "Everyone bet on the same 240Hz LCD horse." That is, not only are all the 3DTVs using active shutter-based glasses, but they're all LCD sets. *Whoops*—turns out that 3DTV seems to work a lot better on plasma sets. It's not just Panasonic (noted in the article); Samsung's also pushing 3D plasma. Oh, there's AMOLED TVs, but they're nowhere near commercial introduction at large-screen sizes. Basically, Stokes is saying the least viewable of the current options for 3DTV—where his thought was "I'm going to have a headache if I don't get these glasses off immediately"—is *the winner* we're all going to buy even if we don't want it. Then there's a bunch of blather about the desirability of sets that aren't going to make it to the market.

Here's where it gets truly strange. Stokes describes plasma sets—not as good as AMOLED, but better than LCD—and notes that there's nothing here that would encourage most "cash-strapped consumers" to go 3D. But, he says, *it doesn't matter*. "We won't have a choice." Why? Because 3DTVs can also be used as 2DTVs:

> Eventually, when all of the TV panels produced by the panel-makers are 3D-capable due to economies of scale, you'll have as hard a time finding a non-3D-capable display as you do finding a non-HD display today.

This involves a whole bunch of assumptions, among them that 3D will have long-term legs. That's not a given. In any case, even if some future panel has 3D capability built in, it's not a 3DTV unless it includes both the emitter and 3D glasses—and if Stokes is claiming these devices will become universal *even if people don't want them*, he's talking out of his hat. Or some other region.

Richard Nash: Book Publishing 10 Years in the Future

Who's Richard Nash? He was a publisher at Soft Skull Press (which I'd never heard of) and became a consultant and, I guess, entrepreneur, pushing a "portfolio of niche social publishing communities" called Cursor. (With a description like that, how can it lose?) He believes in "long-form edited narrative texts" (in other words, books) and the "future of connecting writers and readers, in a Web 3.0 that's about the filters." (I'd comment on that, but first I'd have to understand it.) Cursor has the tagline "Transforming the social contract of publishing by restoring the writer-reader relationship to its true equilibrium." I honestly just don't *get* a lot of this—I guess I don't see book-length writing as always inherently or desirably involving membership communities combining authors and readers.

But that's me, and in my elder years I may be a bear of little brain. Nash seems to favor long-form text, whether called books or something else, and so do I. He has a blog that uses black sans type on a medium-gray background (difficult to read) for long essays, which surprises me for a supposed publishing expert, and his writing seems...well, far be it from me to criticize other writers.

Back to the item cited above, which actually appeared on January 5, 2010 at *GalleyCat*. Nash is in prediction mode and a strange set of predictions they are. Take the first: "Most predictions for 2020 that are not actually wrong will happen by 2015 or sooner." You can't *fault* a statement like that—for one thing, sensible futurists give themselves some leeway and, for another, "that are not actually wrong" is a loophole big enough to drive any truck through. #2: "Most predictions for 2020 ungrounded in history will be inadequate." Huh? For one thing, precious few predictions are "ungrounded in history"—most futurists don't blow them entirely out of their nether parts—and "inadequate" is a conclusive term whose meaning is, um, inadequate. I felt as though I should eat the fortune cookie at this point.

The rest? #3 seems to be a very long and involved way of saying "Big Publishers and Big Bookstore Chains won't dominate the landscape in 2020," and that's probably right (but I may be misunderstanding the paragraph)—the blockbuster-book syndrome and the "return unsold copies for full credit" model are both economically absurd in the long run. #4 is a remarkably obtuse way of saying "Text-only books will survive; multimedia doesn't kill the book" (or "long-form text-only narrative," to avoid the nasty b-word). I *think* #5 is saying letterpress books may be treasured, but

maybe he's just saying physical books will still be desirable—damned if I can be sure. #6 speaks of "the last days of publishing," and this seems to mean New York-style Big Publishing House publishing. #7 is one of these "the Golden Age wasn't so golden" comments that's true enough, easy to say and rather pointless—and #8 (developing nations are going to produce boatloads of novels) seems almost certain.

I *think* I may agree with much of what he's saying. I'm not sure. I'm not at all surprised that one commenter, "howardwhite," seems to think long-form narrative and novels are only around because of the way printed books work. Oh really?

Future of the Internet IV

Did I say something earlier about crowdsourcing futurism? That's what Pew Internet does with its panel of "experts"—895 "technology stakeholders and critics." I'm generally steering clear of Pew Internet these days for various reasons, and maybe I should steer clear here as well. Indeed, I'm deliberately choosing not to click through to the detailed responses, but you might find it interesting to do so. For what it's worth, I tend to agree with the majority on the five issues—that is, I *don't* believe Google is making us stupid; I *do* believe that, in general, the internet is and will be a positive factor for reading and writing; I'm *certain* successful innovation won't generally be predictable; it's likely that most information will flow freely over most of the internet in most nations (with some big exceptions); and it will still be possible, *but not easy*, to be anonymous online in 2020.

I don't want to pile on Nicholas Carr, who's apparently making a career of being shallow and stupid, but generalizing from yourself is never a good thing. Here's what he said to Pew with regard to the "stupid" question:

> What the Net does is shift the emphasis of our intelligence, away from what might be called a meditative or contemplative intelligence and more toward what might be called a utilitarian intelligence. The price of zipping among lots of bits of information is a loss of depth in our thinking

Bull. Nobody forces you to spend all your time on the net. If you're incapable of turning off the damn computer and contemplating, don't blame the computer. In this case, I'll agree with Peter Norvig of Google, as paraphrased in a February 22, 2010 piece on *Discover*'s Discoblog:

> Because Google makes so much information available instantly, it's a good strategy for a knowledge-seeker to skim through many offerings first to get an overview. Then the user can settle down with the best sources for a deeper read. He added that skimming and concentrating can and should coexist.

I tend to use Bing rather than Google, but the point's the same. Skimming and concentrating can and should coexist. They always have and I believe they always will.

How to be a Futurist (Part 2)

This one's mostly for fun, from *What's Next: Top Trends* on January 12, 2010—that blog (by Richard Watson) being an ongoing source of interesting ideas from a "supposed futurist." It's just a list of ten items, some silly and some *way* too true. For example:

> 4. Say things that are very difficult to substantiate.
>
> 5. Be hazy about when things will happen.
>
> 7. If any prediction ever comes true make a lot of noise about it.
>
> 8. If anything doesn't come true keep really quiet about it.

Maybe this is time to note "On Futurists" from the same blog (dated April 1, 2010). Watson quotes somebody in an audience: "I love listening to futurists, they are always interesting. And they are always wrong." He nails one reason for this: "Part of the problem is that futurists seem to believe in only one future. The one they have picked." In fact, Watson says, there must be more than one future—and, noted later, "we have the power to invent the future we want." Not wholly, to be sure, but we sure can influence it.

Then there's this:

> The other problem futurists seem to suffer from is that they get ahead of themselves. Quite often their 'what' is quite accurate but their 'when' is usually way off. Their timing stinks and once again I think that's because they assume a singular future. They assume, for example, that all newspapers will be e-papers in the future or that all music will be digital. But the word rarely works like that. It's a marginal world out there and hardly anything is ever 100%...

Yep, although I'd disagree with "Quite often their 'what' is quite accurate."

That Whole Internet Thing's Not Going to Work Out

That's the title of this March 2, 2010 *Slate* article by Farhad Manjoo—if you look at the page itself. If you

look at the browser header, though, it's "How to suss out bad tech predictions," which appears as the tease on the page itself. In any case, Manjoo begins by noting Clifford Stoll's *Silicon Snake Oil* and *Newsweek* essay based on it. As you may remember, Stoll was (is?) even more of an internet skeptic than I am—to the point of being a knowledgeable denier. On the other hand, he was partly right. "No CD-ROM can take the place of a competent teacher" sounds right to me, and while "no online database will replace your daily newspaper" is effectively wrong, I'm not sure this is a good thing. On the other hand, Stoll had far too many "nevers"—and, by the way, Stoll is one of those rare experts who will admit to being wrong. (On February 26, he said of this essay "Of my many mistakes, flubs, and howlers, few have been as public as my 1995 howler.") Stoll also said no computer network would change the way government operates—and he may be right about that one. Realistically, Stoll was saying the internet as the "information superhighway" was being overhyped in 1995, and in that he was right—at the time. (Remember when we were all going to have our groceries and pet food delivered, with supermarkets doomed?)

Getting past Stoll, Manjoo offers two sentences that maybe should have ended the article:

> Given how wrong they tend to be, it's generally a good idea to ignore all predictions. The future is unknowable—especially in the digital age, when we're constantly barraged with new technologies.

But we can't have that, can we? So Manjoo offers some rules from separating good predictions from bad predictions. "Good predictions are based on current trends." Well, sure, except that bad predictions take current trends and do linear projections (or, worse, geometric projections) that become laughable. "Don't underestimate people's capacity for change." Maybe, but bad predictions *commonly* underestimate people's desire for choice and frequent preference for continuity. "New stuff sometimes comes out of the blue." That's true enough…as long as it's coupled with "but it generally doesn't sweep away old stuff." Here's an odd one: "These days it's best to err on the side of optimism." Yep, that's why the house we purchased last year in Livermore was worth 50% more in 2009 than in 2005 and why the Dow is at 30,000. Oh, wait… In this case, Manjoo's telling us something about himself, not about good predictions. Indeed, he seems to think that Raymond Kurzweil's "singularity" predictions (and projected immortality) are "based on current trends, and nothing about them seems really impossible." Sure.

Library-Related Futures

Some future-related commentaries from a library or librarian's perspective—or leftovers from the June 2010 THE ZEITGEIST: THERE IS NO FUTURE.

Tuesday Night Deep Thought: Information Future?

Andy Woodworth posted this on February 24, 2010 at *Agnostic, Maybe* (still one of the best liblog names I've ever encountered). He found himself pondering this question:

> Where will information content be in five years? Ten years?

Woodworth decided he couldn't come up with an answer, doesn't believe anybody else has a non-speculative answer, and that—if you took "the answers" from a bunch of people, sealed them up, and looked at them in five or ten years, "they would be mostly (if not completely) wrong." I might respond that there *is* no (single) answer for the same reason there is no future: There are many answers, and most of them will be partly true, partly false.

Woodworth decides to look at the past—specifically the websites he uses now and where they were five years ago. It's an interesting list, although it might be even more interesting to get a list of "clear game-changer" sites from five years ago and see which of them are still important or even around.

It's unfortunate that Woodworth feels the need to add a comment about "the general decline in printed newspaper and periodical readership that has trended during this time period"—since that "general decline" in periodical readership is neither clear nor necessarily true. (Even for printed newspapers, it's not a *general* decline; it's mostly a decline in afternoon newspapers and large metropolitan newspapers.)

Woodworth concludes:

> There are simply a lot of things going on; too much, I believe, for anyone to grasp in terms of the big picture. And I think it's time that the librarian community admits that we really don't know where exactly information content is going to end up in that time. Sure, we can say where it

will be in the short short scale of maybe a year, perhaps two, but beyond that is lost to us.

I'd put that differently. There will *always* be a lot going on—and the big picture is likely to be made up of a lot of little pictures, not well suited to grand statements or generalizations. In fact, the "general decline in printed newspaper and periodical readership" is one of those generalizations better avoided.

Information is not free

This is a reaction to Seth Godin's deeply ignorant post about libraries (discussed in June) that I missed—it's from Erin Downey Howerton at *schooling.us* and appeared January 9, 2010. Some of what Howerton has to say (it's a reasonably short post, and maybe you should go to schoolingdotus.blogspot.com and read it yourself), noting that text in quoted italics comes from Godin's post:

> *"They can't survive as community-funded repositories for books that individuals don't want to own (or for reference books we can't afford to own.)"* I have yet to see the person able to afford all the books they will ever need in their lifetime. Or a personal subscription to all the magazines they might want to read, or all the databases they might need to consult... I'm not sure I'd want to live in a world where we only had access to the ideas we could afford to buy.
>
> *"The information is free now."* Information is never free. Libraries and librarians work to provide access (using your tax dollars) to hugely diverse, authoritative sources of information in many formats. Yes, there is more access to information than ever before but access is not equal for all...
>
> My last thought: in many communities, the public library is the last truly democratic place. Anyone can come in, anyone can read for free, anyone can meet freely. There needs to be at least one place that is open to all in every community, and the library is as much a place as it is a collection.

I've stopped taking Seth Godin seriously, particularly as his blog seems to be turning into a series of fortune cookies, but other people do take him seriously. It's good that there are thoughtful people like Howerton responding. It's unfortunate that her blog probably has a small fraction of Godin's audience.

Futures Thinking for Academic Librarians: Higher Education in 2025

I've now read this ACRL publication (33 pages, published June 2010, available at www.ala.org/ala/mgrps/ divs/acrl/issues/value/futures2025.pdf) twice. And thought about what I might say about it. And concluded that this is what I should say:

This is an interesting set of more than two dozen scenarios—not *a* future but a varied set of *possible changes* in the future, with informed comments on both the probability (and timing) of each and the impact on academic libraries. It's well worth reading and thinking about if you're in academic libraries or care about academia. The price is right and I believe the approach is sensible. My own opinions on the 25 scenarios? Even if I have them, they're really irrelevant. **Go read it and think about it**.

A much smaller group of the largest academic libraries did something vaguely similar a few months later, yielding *The ARL 2030 Scenarios: A User's Guide for Research Libraries* (www.arl.org/bm~doc/arl-2030-scenarios-users-guide.pdf). The differences? We get four grand scenarios instead of 26 smaller scenarios; the timeline is five years further out; the publication is much longer (92 pages)...and, frankly, I didn't read that one in full. Nor will I comment on it—or the October 19, 2010 *Chronicle of Higher Education* piece about it and some of the comments that piece received.

Libraries are Dying (And That's A Good Thing)

With the preface "Guest Post:", this appeared on July 1, 2010 on Steve Lawson's *See Also...*, perhaps accidentally posted three months late—or perhaps not. It's set as email from "a person whom I don't know" with an attachment that might be parody.

The "attached article" begins "Within the next 25 years, libraries will become wholly unnecessary. This is a good thing, not a tragedy" and goes from there. It is...well...it is what it is. There's a lot of Technological Inevitability here and some first-rate snark. There are a handful of direct comments—and a copy of a much larger discussion from FriendFeed.

Do I regard this as serious library futurism? Probably not. Do I believe the post—and more, I think, the FF discussion—make some interesting points? Probably so. As for my own thoughts, well, I'm part of that FF discussion and will stand by what I said there: Wholly imaginary scenarios aren't terribly instructive. But I could be wrong.

Futures Thinking and My Job in 10 Years, Part II

This one's by John Dupuis, posted July 27, 2010 at *Confessions of a Science Librarian*—and it's mostly

about "good futurism," thinking about future possibilities and looking for surprising implications rather than trying to predict simplistic futures. Dupuis quotes futurist Jamais Casico—and any futurist who says (in advocating that people craft multiple futures) "Whatever you come up with, you'll be wrong" has disarmed my snarky instincts right off the bat.

Good futurism is about considering possibilities and thinking through implications—and seeing to what extent we can or should try to create the futures we prefer. The post discusses good futurism; it's a version of the start of a book Dupuis is working on. I think it's likely to be worth following, just as this post is worth reading.

Deathwatches Galore

No particular order, and too many of these to give extended commentary—except that, as I go through two dozen items, I now find that most of them aren't even worth mentioning. Deathwatches are as much lazy writing as anything: Say something extreme to get the reader's attention, whether you have evidence or not. The most absurd may be the one that occupied a full magazine cover: *Wired*'s "The Web is dead"—but that's *Wired*, which specializes in hyperbole.

A word about hyperbole: I've had one valued colleague in the library field defend hyperbole as his approach to speaking. I don't buy it, mostly because too many in the audience won't be aware that it *is* hyperbole. Tell people "apps will probably be less important in 2011 than they are in 2010," and I want to know more. Tell people "apps are dead" and you are, of course, dead wrong—except that a fair number of listeners, who don't recognize that you're fond of hyperbole, will go back and shut down their modest app efforts because that's what you said and you're apparently worth listening to.

I don't buy the need for hyperbole. I believe it does more harm than good. This may be one reason I'm not getting speaking invitations.

10 Things Not to Buy in 2010
Here's a piece by AnnaMaria Andriotia from *SmartMoney*, appearing on Yahoo! Finance, that might be a lot less annoying without that deliberate *advice* in the title and the introductory paragraphs. That is, these aren't things that might have smaller market shares this year than in the past; they're things *you should actively avoid buying.*

Why? Because they "appear poised for a dip in sales, which could be a prelude to obsolescence."

Look at the reasoning here: Because *we think* X *might* suffer falling sales, which *could* mean that it's nearing obsolescence, therefore *you shouldn't buy* X. I'll say this for that logic: A neater summary of self-fulfilling predictions could hardly be stated. "If all of you do what I say, then my predictions will be correct. Therefore, you should do what I say." Bleh.

It is, of course, also a "the new is *always* better than the old" piece and touts "revolutionary products" that will replace "old mainstays." It offers the flat statement that "DVDs, books, newspapers and magazines will continue to lose ground to services like in-home movie rentals and gadgets like the Amazon Kindle"—and urges readers to be part of that shift.

Here's the list, with my comments—noting that the issue here is *not* whether some things mentioned may have a declining market share, but whether it's sensible to tell people to avoid them in 2010.

➢ **DVDs**. You *shouldn't buy* DVDs because Blockbuster's in trouble and DVDs (can) cost more than on-demand rentals. What? You want to see a movie or TV series several times? Nobody does that! My own situation: We'll be buying fewer DVDs in the future...because if we're going to buy something, it's likely to be a Blu-ray Disc. I'm guessing this writer thinks we should avoid BD as well.

➢ **Home Telephone Service** (that is, landlines). You *should avoid them* now because "it will probably take a while, but home landlines could become as archaic as the rotary phone." You get better call clarity on landlines? Doesn't matter.

➢ **External Hard Drives**. What? Even as they're getting absurdly cheap? Nope. "An up-and-coming alternative might be simpler and save you another transition down the road." It's the cloud, of course—even though *it's more expensive* (as stated in the article, which overstates the starting price for an external hard disk). This one makes no sense to me at all, except on the basis that "more digital is even better than some digital."

➢ **Smartphone Also-Rans**. By which the writer apparently means anything other than iPhones and BlackBerry units. Oh, and

Android phones. I don't know what to say here, other than that the claimed market shares don't match what I've seen elsewhere for installed bases of phones.

➤ **Compact Digital Cameras**. Really? That's right: You *should not buy* a compact digital camera—you should buy a digital SLR instead. Even though it will cost several times as much and be considerably bulkier. This is "everybody should have the same preferences" nonsense at its worst.

➤ **Newspaper Subscriptions**. "The morning newspaper *has been replaced* by a growing online media presence." That's it: Newspapers are dead. Oh, and 360 magazines shut down in 2009 (as another few hundred began), therefore they're dead too. And, you know, ebook Readers *"could* increasingly become one-stop sources to access newspapers, magazines and books." Therefore, *you should stop buying newspapers* even if you prefer them.

➤ **CDs**. "When was the last time you bought a CD or even walked into a record store?" Within the last six months for the first, a while longer for the second. But so what? If I don't buy them, then you don't need to tell me not to buy them; if I do, then you have no business telling me not to.

➤ **New College Textbooks**. Hey, if I was in college and could legitimately get by with used texts or downloadable books, great.

➤ **Gas-Guzzling Cars**. I'm all for telling people they shouldn't buy gas-guzzling cars because they're bad for the environment and use up a limited resource. But the pitch here is that gas hogs may become less popular, therefore you should avoid them.

➤ **Energy-Inefficient Homes and Appliances**. There are excellent reasons not to buy these things. Popularity isn't one of them.

The last two? Probably good advice, but for the wrong reasons. The rest? The worst kind of deathwatch: Don't buy these because we think they *might* become obsolescent. You know how long something can be obsolescent before it becomes either obsolete or useless? Decades. You know what they call people who don't buy things *that meet their needs or preferences* because they're in-

formed that those things could become obsolescent? Fools.

RSS is Dead…Long Live RSS

That's from Tony Hirst's *OUseful.Info, the blog* on August 9, 2009—and it's a classic "it isn't working for as many people as we'd like, therefore it's dead" case. The post says "RSS subscription hasn't worked in the browser, or on the Windows desktop" and very little more. The first comment notes that the RSS icon is nearly universal in browser address bars (so you don't need an explicit RSS link)—and Hirst's response clarifies the problem: "I think you're wrong: for most people, I'd be willing to wager the feed icon in the browser address is invisible to them…" So what's really being said is that *most people* don't subscribe to RSS feeds. That's probably true. So what? (The suggestion that people would use RSS more if it was called "follow" or something…I'm doubtful.)

RSS is a classic case of a technology that doesn't suit everybody but works extremely well for those who want it. Similarly for delicious (which I was late to adopt): It astonishes me when I'm told that people (apparently, *all* people) mark something they want to read later by bookmarking it in their browser, which I regard as a cumbersome way to do it. Most people don't use delicious or any of its competitors: That neither makes them dead nor useless.

Back to the comments, "harrym" may have it right here:

> It's…not that surprising that not many people use RSS. It's a feature for heavy users—which, by definition, most people aren't.

But, as harrym also says, RSS isn't dead. It's just not universal. When Hirst and others talk of how successful social networks are at this sort of thing…well, you know, Twitter isn't used by most people, FriendFeed by a lot fewer. I'd bet that *active* Facebook users who participate and follow—let's say at least once a day—represent a small minority of web users.

The iPod is Dead

Classic deathwatch by Farhad Manjoo, who should (but clearly does not) know better, posted September 10, 2009 at *Slate*. He's saying the "days of the dedicated music player have come and gone." It's nonsense—particularly when he extends it to assert that all special-purpose digital devices are headed towards being general-purpose portable computers.

As is typical with this sort of thing, Manjoo gets some facts wrong—e.g., the assertion that it's "now impossible" to get a cell phone that doesn't have a camera. There's a reason the Jitterbug is popular with millions of people; *lack* of extraneous features is part of that reason. More to the point, adding secondary features needn't distract from a primary feature: The iPod won't be dead until and unless people stop wanting things that are *primarily* music players. My cute little Sansa Express was technically *not* a dedicated MP3 player: Like almost every non-Apple MP3 player that's ever been produced, it included FM radio and voice recording. (Yes, Apple finally turned these on, but they're late to the game.) So what? I didn't use them, they didn't affect the overall design, they were largely hidden frills. My even cuter and slightly larger 8GB Sansa Fuze can show video and also has that FM radio and voice recording, and I tested just enough to know that the FM radio works extremely well—but for me, it's a dedicated MP3 player. Period.

Maybe Manjoo isn't really talking about dedicated devices. Maybe he's talking about Apple's apparent need to keep soaking its dedicated followers for new versions of whatever they have. But no, he flatly says *all* players "will morph into computers," that specialized devices *always* turn into general-purpose devices.

Maybe I shouldn't be surprised that, 10 months later, there have been exactly zero comments on this story. Maybe people are just yawning and turning the page—er—following another link.

All Newspapers Will Be Dead by 2012

That's not the actual headline on this April 27, 2010 piece from *Bloomberg Businessweek*, but it's what Sumner Redstone of Viacom seems to have said, attacking Rupert Murdoch for investing in newspapers. A direct quote: "there won't be any newspapers in two years." But then, Redstone is an 86-year-old who says he plans "to live forever" and that "movies and television will be here forever, like me."

I don't place serious bets, ever, but if I did, I would gladly bet $10,000 that there will be newspapers in 2013—indeed, I'd bet that more than 80% of the newspapers publishing in 2010 (which is more than 80% of those publishing in 2005) will still be publishing in 2013. Since Redstone's so sure, I wonder whether he'd give me odds?

iPad, the destroyer: 19 things it will kill

A classic. This astonishing screed from Daniel Eran Dilger on *RoughlyDrafted Magazine* (like a blog but with pretensions) was posted a day too late: April 2, 2010. In 3,000 words, this Apple enthusiast tells us that Jobs "likes to kill old things" (and somehow seems to assert that Apple was the USB leader, an interesting rewrite of history) and Dilger seems to think killing things is a great idea. Oh, and in Dilger's mind, Apple is more successful than any other company—because, you know, it's Apple.

Maybe we get enough before his list: "TV killed off the radio" and a string of other nonsense statements. Anyway, he offers a paragraph on each of 19 things that are *dead*: DVDs, eReaders, "stacks of papers in office meetings," textbooks, netbooks (a discussion in which he says netbooks have "already killed off the desktop PC"), handheld game devices, brochures, single-purpose industrial gadgets, other tablets, "the credibility of haters" (you need to understand the code: if you say *anything* negative about Apple, you're a "hater," where if you denounce everybody except Apple, you're an informed commentator), Flash et al, Office, TiVo and set-top boxes, idle moments, Chrome OS, Android, Windows Phone 7, in-flight entertainment, Google's ad monopoly.

In amongst the explanations, you learn that everybody else rips off Apple (the only true originator), you understand that *we're all going to have iPads right away* and use them all the time…you get a sense of the mind of a reasonably literate fanboi. (The Office discussion? I'm sure it's written in English, but I won't even attempt to make sense of it.) As you might expect, most comments are from people who read this, um, magazine regularly, so they're mostly supportive. We get the all-too-predictable "hard disks are dead too" item (since, you know, flashram gets cheaper by 50% every two years, where hard disks only get cheaper by…well, by about 50% every year, but never mind). A few people call out the extreme fanboi attitude—but you know how blog audiences are. Oh, and "idle moments" being dead…well, for those who crave constant interruptions, that's been true for a very long time. For those of us who understand balance, not so much. (Some "dissenters" let me know just how much this is a specific audience, such as one who says Office would only die if Microsoft stopped developing Mac-specific versions.

Which probably account for about 5% of Office sales...not that Microsoft has any intention of that, as evidenced by Office 2011.) Encountering the writer's snide responses to one of the legitimate dissents, in which it becomes clear that "dead" can mean anything from "no longer a monopoly" to "I don't like them" is also informative. The man is simply vicious about anyone who disagrees with him, throwing out personal insults as though he's an untalented version of Don Rickles.

Facebook social Q&A service is the harbinger of the death of reference
That's from Jeffrey Pomerantz on June 1, 2010 at *PomeRantz*. He's even less ambiguous in the test than in the title. Here's what he says about the announcement from Facebook of a beta question-answering service:

> I say, this is the death of library reference. Not that this Facebook service specifically will kill reference. But the fact that Facebook has jumped on the Q&A bandwagon is a signal that the last nail on the coffin of library reference was put in place some time ago.

There's more to it than that, but that's the gist—or maybe it's that moving from "one player" (when, exactly, were libraries the only way to get questions answered?) to a market means the "one player" can't rely on that business. In explaining that, he mentions that "IBM is no longer in the hardware business," which must come as one hell of a surprise to IBM (it's not in the *PC* business, but it's the world's largest server manufacturer, among other things). Later, Pomerantz says—*in boldface*—"**Libraries need to give up the notion that question answering is a core service of the library**." He thinks libraries should only offer reference services on issues that "*only the library* can deal with." Further, he seems to be saying that, *in general,* libraries can only exist to the extent that they do something *nobody else does*, or more generally that a business must be a monopoly to succeed. (I may be overinterpreting here, but not by a lot.)

I've rarely used reference services at public libraries. Does that make them useless? Well, I don't use story hours or adult programming or DVDs or romance novels or how-to-do-it nonfiction either, so I guess libraries should stop all those irrelevant things. All of which have competitors or alternate sources.

In practice, good librarians have research skills and resources that most patrons don't. I've seen my wife at work on various projects; her librarian skills make her superior at digging out real answers to tough questions. Crowdsourcing may work for some of that, but not for all of it—and since there have been crowdsourced Q&A services for many, many years, adding FB to the mix is hardly tantamount to pushing libraries out of it.

Comments range from the mysterious to the thoughtful—and Pomerantz returns to say "This was a rant" and he'd rather not engage in a thoughtful conversation. His followup also makes an important distinction: "I'm mostly referring to academic library reference services." *Whoops! Another academic librarian who simply ignores public libraries.* He calls it a "hazard of the trade," and that's a nice way to put it. In the end, he essentially says he's right, so there's no point in discussing it. OK, then.

Clive Thompson on the Death of the Phone Call
Oh, sorry, it's from *Wired Magazine* (posted July 28, 2010, and appearing in the August 2010 issue), and I shouldn't be shooting fish in a barrel. Thompson finds that he's making a lot fewer phone calls, and *of course* (hey, he writes for *Wired*) moves directly to "the death of the telephone call." 'Cuz, you know, The New Generation Doesn't Make Phone Calls. At all. Period. Full stop. End of story.

The role of phone calls has changed, thanks in part to email (over the past 20 years), messaging, etc., etc. That's true. It's generally a good thing. Heck, I *hate* phone calls. I make and get very few of them.

But dead? And The Digital Generation Doesn't Make Them, Ever? Give me a break. Retitle this "Clive Thompson needed a column topic" and you've said just as much.

Speaking Up about Deathwatches

Turns out I was using the "deathwatch" tag in delicious for two kinds of commentary: Those that engaged in deathwatching, and those that *comment* on deathwatches.

How to talk about presentations you haven't seen
Steve Lawson's essentially given up on *See also...* and that may be a shame. Some of his infrequent posts have been wonderfully thought provoking (or just provoking, and provocateurs have their place), such as this one, posted April 16, 2010.

He begins by noting a general problem—one that I've struggled with: What to do with posts and tweets about conference presentations when you weren't actually there.

> It's too tempting to take quick conference blog posts (or worse, Twitter posts) at face value, and assume that
>
> - what was reported is actually what was said;
> - the person who said it belives it; and
> - the person who reported it appoves of the sentiment.
>
> None of that is necessarily true. So it's tempting to decide simply not to comment at all. I know that Walt Crawford tries to do that.

I try to do that because I've gotten too much grief for *not* doing it. Steve, who'd just finished reading Pierre Bayard's *How to Talk About Books You Haven't Read* (hmm: I should read that), concludes that he doesn't need to be so circumspect—and takes off from the Dead Technology session at the Computers in Libraries, which he didn't attend. "The mere existence of such a panel prompted people to create their own lists of dead tech and have their own arguments online, and it also prompted people to second-guess the technologies that were reported by eyewitnesses." There were FriendFeed threads; there were hashtags. I participated in the FriendFeed thread Lawson links to (how would I not?).

And there are interesting points. One participant said Velcro® was dead—and *as a technology*, that might be true. It's used all over the place and is likely to continue for decades—but it's not viewed as a technology any more than print books are viewed as technological devices. It is, of course, as are they. It's just *established* technology. Or, as Lawson puts it, "It's no longer technology; it is lint."

He discusses truly almost-dead technologies, where the question is why we should care. He uses microcards as an example. I'm not sure they're actually dead, but they're pretty close. He also suggests you could fruitfully discuss technologies that *you believe* to carry the seeds of their own destruction, and thinks the ludicrous "the iPad is dead" might be one such case.

What he's saying, I think, is that the *useful* version of "X is dead" is this (taken directly from the most recent comment, which happens to be by Lawson):

> For a "dead media" topic to be interesting, it would probably get you to not only think differently about the medium in question, but to think differently about what it means to be "dead."

Generalize that to deathwatches in general, and I'm inclined to agree. "X is dead" can be simplistic, arrogant or just wrong—but the other questions are interesting. Do they need the "dead" moniker? Only to bring in the crowds.

Is the iPad killing netbook sales? Probably not

When you're a publishing conglomerate like Condé Nast, you can have a mix of extremist and more nuanced sites and publications; for example, *ars technica* may be the saner cousin of *Wired.com*. Chris Foresman posted this item "five months ago" (as of October 22, 2010) at *ars technica*—and Foresman does something sensible.

Yes, the *growth* in netbook sales has declined considerably. Some analysts claim this is because of the iPad (and, in extreme cases, that "netbooks are dead."). Foresman looks at the historic record and makes a far more probable conclusion: Netbooks have started to saturate their market niche. It's also important to note that it is simply not possible to keep up 300% annual growth rates over more than a year or two and that netbook sales have *not* started falling: They've just stopped growing rapidly.

Earth to tech bloggers: FM lives! (In fact, it's growing)

Here's that pesky *ars technica* again—this time Matthew Lasar "2 months ago" (love the site, *hate* the dating methodology). It's all indirect: Because of an agreement on artist royalties for various media, tech bloggers are referring to FM radio as "dying" and "obsolete." A writer who should know better proposes shutting down FM entirely.

And yet…Arbitron says that radio listening is growing and currently reaches more than 93% of those 12 and over at least once a week. Arbitron may be off, but not by such an extent that "FM is dying" is anything but gratuitous nonsense. The more general point:

> We sometimes brand things "obsolete" or "dying" based not on their actual use, but on the fact that something else has come along that we think is (or will be) better.

Hard to argue with that. Oh, but commenters do—somehow believing that FM is being kept alive through various conspiracies. (The back-

ground issue is a proposed FCC rule that would force mobile devices to include FM radios—which might be "cumbersome," but nearly every non-Apple MP3 player has always had them, they're already part of the chipsets in many cell phones, including iPhones and Symbion-based devices...in other words, it *might* add $1 or so to the production cost of *some* devices. Should it be mandated? I'd be opposed—I agree that it's a ridiculous mandate.) Do I listen to the radio? Only when in the car or when there's an emergency. Does that count as "no"? Oh, wait...

The Tragic Death of Practically Everything

Here's Harry McCracken at *Technologizer* on August 18, 2010, with the teaser "Microsoft, Firefox, Facebook, the Mac—they live on in our hearts." He's commenting on *Wired*'s asinine "Web is dead" story:

> I'm not sure what the controversy is. For years, once-vibrant technologies, products, and companies have been dropping like teenagers in a Freddy Krueger movie. Thank heavens that tech journalists have done such a good job of documenting the carnage as it happened. Without their diligent reporting, we might not be aware that the industry is pretty much an unrelenting bloodbath.

Following which he provides a bunch of historical image captures on the death of, well, "practically everything." Internet Explorer died in 2004. The Mac? June 6, 2005. Linux: 2006—the same year as TV. Office didn't die until 2007, but Microsoft itself died that year—as did Email. Facebook? 2008, along with BlackBerry, while FireFox and the desktop *might* have died in 2009. The iPod? McCracken cites the same Manjoo story I did. 2010 hasn't been much better. The Wii died in February. The netbook in April. OpenOffice in May.

All of these illustrated with segments of actual stories, mostly from semi-reputable sources. The list could go on almost forever, couldn't it?

America's Most Underestimated Company

This one, from James Ledbetter on September 1, 2010 at *Slate,* is narrow: "Why is everyone always writing off Netflix?" The lead sentence is a magnificent example of counterhyperbole or drastic understatement: "People who think and write about technology companies for a living are prone to be wrong now and again." You think?

As Ledbetter notes, Netflix has been killed off or regarded as obsolete more often than most—including the stock analysts who've called it

worthless. (Really: One analyst called Netflix a "worthless piece of crap" in 2005, and others continue to claim that it's doomed.) Good old crazy-man Jim Cramer told viewers to sell Netflix when it was $19 a share—and later ate a piece of a hat with Netflix' stock symbol on it. (When Ledbetter's piece appeared, Netflix was trading at $130. As I'm editing this, it's at $168.)

The story offers some useful thoughts on why analysts consistently get Netflix wrong, although I think Ledbetter misses one key element: Netflix grows loyal customers by treating us well. He does understand that "keeps its customers happy" is key to Netflix success—but maybe not just how good it is at that job. Every time I get a sandwich at Subway, I walk by one of the remaining Blockbuster stores with a huge poster telling me why Blockbuster's DVD-by-mail plan is so superior to Netflix. Which is presumably why Blockbuster is bankrupt. (Comments are interesting. As usual, the few who've left Netflix seem to think they should be able to get every movie the day it's released and don't care about anything older—which means they shouldn't be Netflix customers. And, of course, there's one True Capitalist who doesn't give a damn about Netflix as a company—only whether the stock price will go up or down.)

Not dead yet: the danger of 'End-ism'

"End-ism" is another word for what I've called deathwatches or deathspotting: The labeling of things as dead or ended or over. This post is by Simon Waldman on September 4, 2010 at *Creative Disruption.* Noting some books and magazine articles—the end of work, the end of history, the death of advertising and, to be sure, the death of the Web—Waldman also notes the tendency to pronounce something dead without a lick of evidence, as in *Read/Write Web*'s pronouncement that Blockbuster's bankruptcy might mean the end of the DVD. He calls it all End-ism.

> There's two things at play here. The first is simple editorial flourish. After all 'The Web is Dead' is much more enticing than the more accurate '*There's a big shift in the nature of online behaviour*'. 'The End of Work' is better than '*Structural change in employment patterns in the 21st Century, and its consequences.*' [it's still worth a read, by the way].
>
> But, there is also an underlying thought process going on–what I'll call '**End-ism**'–which is a dangerously reductive way of viewing the impact of

structural and disruptive change within a sector. Whenever a business, a medium or a way of doing things that has been dominant for decades faces a profound challenge, perhaps the most significant in its existence, End-ists will automatically declare it 'dead' or 'over.'

As Waldman notes, "End-ists are also normally rampant neophiliacs" unable to comprehend that "the rest of the world is still devoutedly wedded to the old."

> The problem with this thinking is that the *existence and growth of the shiny and new doesn't automatically mean the end of the old*.

Preach it, brother—I've been saying this for, what, fifteen years now? Not that anybody's listening. Waldman notes that "end-ism" is "no problem" for blogging (well…), but gets dangerous when it influences actual thinking within business. I'll go farther: it's dangerous in speaking and writing and blogging because people listen and believe.

There's a lot more to Waldman's piece, more an article than a blog post. Worth reading.

Quote Unquote: Nothing Goes Away…Words of Wisdom from Esquire's David Granger

An unwieldy title for an October 16, 2010 post at Samir Husni's *MrMagazine.com*. He's quoting David Granger from the November 2010 *Esquire* "Letter from the Editor." I'll repeat most of the quote—if it's fair use for Husni, it's fair use for me:

> I lose patience with pundits who prophesy and lobby for the demise of all traditional media in favor of newer forms… [T]he reality is that all of these forms of expression—new and old, digital and analog—are going to continue, and they are going to continue to prosper. The things we create in print and in digital are so completely different from each other that they appeal to fundamentally distinct needs. **The war between old and new is a false construct. Nothing goes away.** The human need to create is too great, and the human desire to be entertained is too intense to allow any form, whether books or oil painting or even blogging, to disappear.

Emphasis added. I'm inclined to agree—but you already knew that.

And in conclusion…

The Web is Dead? I've read the articles (two of them running in parallel, both annoying and absurd). But why bother? *Wired* will be *Wired*, for what it's worth—which, for me, is the $0 worth of about-to-expire airline miles I "paid" for it. That

would have expired by now, except that I also subscribed to a really good publication by Condé Nast, *Portfolio*—a new business magazine almost as well written as *Fortune.* That, unfortunately, didn't make it; instead, I'm ~~blessed~~ stuck with *Wired* for a while longer. I can assure you that the subscription will not be renewed.

Let's end this with the first (in five years—I did a few of these in 2001-2005) of an ongoing series of "disContent" columns that originally appeared in *EContent Magazine*—in this case, the last of a decade's worth of columns, first published in December 2009. The column appears exactly as it did in the magazine, followed by a brief postscript. Note that this column is now available as the last essay in a limited-edition casebound book, *disContent: The Complete Collection*, described on Page 1 of this issue.

'Is Dead' Isn't Dead— But Maybe It Should Be

When was the last time you read some piece of econtent (or print content) proclaiming "X is dead"—where X is something other than a person who's recently deceased? Five minutes ago? An hour ago? Yesterday?

Unless you're luckier than most or read only in rarefied circles, I'll bet it's been less than a week—probably a lot less. I'll also bet that X is *not* dead.

It's gone beyond cliché to the point that it weakens stories to which it's attached. Many stories that use it are sloppy futurism, equating "weaker than it was a year ago" with "dead or about to be," which isn't the way most things work. Others just ache for attention, such as articles that explicitly say "OK, so X is *not* dead" after a paragraph or two of sensationalism. I believe the usage itself should die.

There's an alternative formulation—"X is dead; long live X!" I'm afraid that's also become a cliché. The first title for this piece was "'Is Dead' Is Dead, Or At Least It Should Be," but that was an "X is dead" in itself—and I'm determined to avoid those in the future. (*Mea culpa*: I've used the alternative formulation.)

How prevalent is this nonsense? OCLC WorldCat shows thousands of occurrences. More than 200 titles using the "X is dead; long live X" cliché include cases where X equals advertising, the

book, affirmative action, the revolution, photography, DEC, the church, teaching, economic income, the military, the career, marriage, the party, the sitcom and more—usually, but always, with that "!" at the end to make it extra-special. Do you want to write a book or ebook that uses *exactly the same* title formulation as more than 200 others? Really?

But of course, "X is dead; long live X!" is self-negating. Others—where, at least from the title, the claim for death is meant to be serious, include cases where X equals print, school, good, the NBA, grunge, theater, relativity—and, in a rare double-cliché, *Get Over It! Educational Reform Is Dead, Now What?*

Still, for all these books (and hundreds more), the real problem is with articles, posts and other econtent…and a profusion of declarations that X is dead even as X is just starting to emerge. More than one article has said "Ebooks are dead" or "The ebook is dead" or "The Kindle is dead."

More indicative of the pure failure of the "X is dead" theme are proclamations that this or that social medium or social network is dead. *Wired* (isn't that dead yet?) has announced that blogging is dead. So have many others (including Dan Lyons, better known as Fake Steve Jobs)—sometimes in blog posts. Someone finds a hotter technology *for them*—and that means blogs are dead. (*EContent* used the alternative cliché about blogs in the January/February 2009 issue—few of us are immune from this tired usage.)

Andrew Baron declares Twitter is dead because Tumblr's better. A number of people have pronounced that Google is dead—or that PageRank is dead. Facebook? Yep, as pronounced on a Wall Street site in December 2008; with the qualifier "in US" earlier in 2008 (we all fled our Facebook accounts, remember?); and of course elsewhere. MySpace, of course, is dead, as are user generated content and content itself. (Content was killed by community—and community is dead.)

What about TV—or network TV, broadcast TV, or scripted TV? Dead for years now, pronounced deceased almost as frequently as print books (remember print books?). Newspapers? They died years ago. Why, US papers will probably have a mere $36 billion in ad revenue this year. Apple? Dead for years: Look it up. (So is Microsoft. So is Intel. So is the CPU…) Bing yields the improbable "208 million results" for "email is dead"

as a phrase search—but even Google's 63,100 results are a sign that, well, precise search results are dead. Bing, of course, has been declared dead more than once. So has Ning. So have lists. So have short message services and texting.

Mostly, it's nonsense. Vinyl isn't dead—turntables and albums represent small but apparently profitable and growing businesses. Magazines aren't dead or even close. Books? $40 billion *net* revenue to publishers last year in the US, according to the Book Industry Study Group. Sounds dead to me!

Even AOL isn't quite dead yet. According to Alexa (as of Aug. 10, 2009), it's still running 34 million daily visitors and 130 million daily page views.

"AOL is declining" isn't a snappy headline. It has the virtues of being accurate and making a good lead for an explanation of why that's so and what it means. Isn't that better? Or is nuance dead?

Postscript

By the time I wrote this, I think I already knew that disContent was dead—and as final columns go, this one's not bad.

The CD-ROM Project
Kidstuff

Back in the day, I reviewed quite a few title CD-ROMs aimed at kids (people old enough to read who aren't yet teenagers)—at least a dozen in *Library Hi Tech News*. Several were excellent, including some of Dorling Kindersley's titles. I gave most of them away, but still have three. Let's take a quick look.

My First Amazing History Explorer

I gave this DK Multimedia (Dorling Kindersley) CD-ROM an Excellent review in April 1999. Designed for ages 6-10, it uses a cartoony, animated 640x480 interface with lots of sound and music and relies heavily on explore-and-click interfaces. Basically, you have eight historical periods to explore, with a specific goal (locating eight pieces of a "Time Trail" to rescue a professor) that's there mostly to keep you exploring.

Each period (from Ancient Egypt through Medieval Europe to a city in 1928) has quite a few objects where the cursor changes to a hand. Some

are already animated; others become animated when you click on them. In almost every case, you get animation, appropriate sounds or music, then an illustrated text box (very readable serif type) with the text read to you in a kid's voice as you're reading it.

Some text boxes have stickers you can collect for your journal by answering an easy question. Some have activities that also add to your journal, possibly including "photos" of you—an avatar you build when you start the process, superimposed on some historical setting. Each period also has a Time Trail piece. The information sheet says there's more than two hours of sound and 150 narrated boxes. It's not comprehensive but it's a fairly rich introduction—and it's worth noting that, for example, the Medieval Europe setting includes two positive text boxes on the role of Muslims in that period.

I wanted more, but I thought it was about right for the intended age group. You'd learn something about history while enjoying soe exploration, and I believe what you'd learn would be both accurate and well stated.

How it works now

That's a short paraphrase of my original review. What happened when I tried it in 2010 on Windows 7? The install process included a warning that the Windows version (the disc also has a Mac version) was designed for Windows 3.1 and Windows 95 and might not run right on the unsupported version of Windows it encountered—but that was the only problem.

It ran just fine—with one major caveat: It's an unmovable 640x480 screen (centered on a fixed white background if your screen has higher resolution). I couldn't use it on my preferred secondary screen; the Windows taskbar is hidden while it's running. (Amazing how small 640x480 seems these days...)

But it ran—with sound, animations, everything working beautifully. If you still have this disc, it should work just fine on Windows. (I can't speak to the Mac version.)

Would today's kids spend time exploring this disc? I have no idea.

Contemporary situation

Amazon still offers this through third-party sellers although it's been discontinued; prices run $0.79

and up. There's a slightly newer version (1.1, where the disc in hand is 1.0) offered directly by Amazon for $6.60. (The original price was $30.)

Worldcat.org shows 216 libraries holding this, and I think it's something a kid could explore fully within a week or so.

Are there web equivalents? Perhaps—but I wouldn't know how to find them. And, again, I have no idea whether today's kids would find this CD-ROM or a web equivalent engaging. If they would, the CD-ROM still works just fine.. (It says you should shift to 256 color mode for best performance, but performance in standard mode with no compatibility tricks was never less than crisp.)

Rocky & Bullwinkle's Know-It-All Quiz Game

Remember Rocky & Bullwinkle? Bullwinkle J. Moose is the host of this quiz game, and that's what it is: Two or three teams of three players each (two players on each team are cartoon characters, and if you're by yourself the game will assign a cartoon character to head up the second team), with either easy or "hard" questions in a dozen categories. Round one offers five multiple-choice questions from each of two categories, alternating between teams. Round two has nine questions from each of two categories. Round three has ten true-false statements from any of three categories.

In each round, you get penalized for wrong answers—and in the first two rounds, if the first team answers wrong or doesn't answer within five seconds, you can buzz in and get half credit for a right answer. There are more than 2,800 questions in all. Meantime, you get various popups from cartoon characters (all voiced by the original actors). That's about it: Reasonably fast, fairly amusing, and the questions aren't all easy (at the hard level). When I played a full game by myself, it took about half an hour. With people playing against each other, it might or might not take longer. The cartoon interface is crisp and clean. I rated it Excellent back in 1999.

How it works now

Just fine. It installs without complaint (not mentioning possible Windows incompatibility). All the media work beautifully. On the other hand...

It's another fixed 640x480 interface, this time with a black background on a larger screen (and,

oddly, changing the portion of my larger secondary screen that isn't a Windows image from black to white). Oh, and it insists on both opening credits and *long* closing credits (although I think you can avoid those).

I thought kids in the target age range (9-12) would learn some things from this quiz. I'm less certain that's true. It works fine and it only cost $20 in its heyday, but I'm not prepared to say much more.

Contemporary situation
Yep, it's still available--$2.99 and up from a third party on Amazon. It's been discontinued (surprise!). There's a newer version (possibly the same product from a different distributor) for $6.99, also from a third party; it's also been discontinued. I see the same name showing up on products aimed at schools, either for 3rd and 4th grade or for 5th and 6th grade, selling for anywhere from $20 (single disc) to $120 (ten-pack).

I see 33 and 8 libraries (respectively) holding this title—with, oddly enough, one version (from Simon & Schuster, dated 1998) classified as an interactive multimedia CD, the other (the one I tried, from Houghton Mifflin, also dated 1998) classified as a game—although it's also a CD for Windows or Macintosh. I suppose they're both legitimate choices.

Online equivalents? I'm sure there are some, but I'm not a gamer. Are there any with such rich use of cartoon characters *in the original voices*? Dunno.

Probably not a great loss, all things considered, but it was fun in its day, and possibly educational.

Pinball Science

Here's one I was looking forward to: "Build wacky pinball games packed with science facts and learning fun." By David Macaulay, author of *The Way Things Work* (a book but also a CD-ROM, which I'll probably get to eventually). It's another DK Multimedia $30 title, this time with the task of finding and rescuing a mysterious inventor by restoring three Great Inventions, which are actually pinball worlds, to full working order.

Each world is a pinball game with missing parts. You answer questions about scientific principles that make the parts work in order to restore them. Once you've restored all the missing parts, you can play the pinball game.

In 1999, I found it fascinating but was unable to move from one pinball world to another—but then, I was never much good at pinball. The interface blocked out other applications. I thought it was good at teaching scientific principles. But that was in 1999.

How it works now
It doesn't.

Oh, it installs, this time with a warning that it's designed for Windows 95 (even though it appeared in 1998). But when you try to run it, it says you lack proper sound card support and offers you the choice of Quit (which quits) or Continue (which quits).

Too bad, and this doesn't bode well for a bunch of great DK Multimedia discs down the road. If I had to guess, I'd guess this is a matter of hardware-level hooks that were legal in Windows 95 and simply aren't possible in the integrated Windows versions (XP and beyond).

Current alternatives
Amazon still shows it, this time for $10 (from a third party but fulfilled by Amazon). A customer review suggests that it's the same version—and, as the reviewer says, simply not workable on anything more recent than W98.

There also seems to be a 2.1 version, published by "Genuine Dorling Kindersley Multimedia" and selling for $15.88 from a third party, *supposedly* designed for XP, Vista and Windows 7—although, given that specification, the other requirements are a little wonky (233MHz or faster processor, 64MB RAM with 128MB recommended, "sound card and speakers," 800x600 monitor with 16-bit color, and QuickTime 7). It appears that 119 libraries hold this in various editions, with 17 specifically holding 2.1.

If the newer version works on Windows 7, it could still be enjoyable and educational—Macaulay's humor, visuals and approach are all first-rate. I have no doubt that many online pinball games are available; I wonder whether anything like this is around?

The Liblog Landscape 2007-2010

2. Methods and Metrics

What's a liblog? I define it as a blog written by one or more library people (librarians, library staff and fringe types like me) *or* a blog written about li-

brary issues—excluding official blogs of all stripes. In a few cases, I've excluded blogs by library people that are clearly not library-related.

You may have seen the term "biblioblogos-phere." I used that term for the first in this series of studies. I don't use it anymore because it's too broad and too narrow—the term should include library blogs (blogs that are official library projects) and blogs related to books and publishing wholly outside the library arena, and the term should exclude liblogs that have nothing to do with books as such.

Requirements and Exclusions

To be included in this study, a blog had to meet five requirements and avoid one exclusion:

- ➢ **Viewable**: I had to be able to reach the blog on the open web, using Firefox, without passwords, at some time between June 1 and September 14, 2010.
- ➢ **Blog**: It must have at least minimal characteristics of a blog—that is, a stream of individual posts presented in reverse chronological order.
- ➢ **English**: Most posts (based on inspection of the first viewed page) must be in English.
- ➢ **Liblog**: Either the blogger(s) must identify themselves as library people (not necessarily librarians) or the blog must relate to libraries or librarianship. I'm interpreting "library" to include archives and museums.
- ➢ **As of May 31, 2010**: There must be at least one post dated on or before May 31, 2010.
- ➢ **Exclusion**: **Official blogs**: Blogs that appear to be official as opposed to personal, including library blogs, corporate blogs and others, are excluded. This is frequently a judgment call—e.g., a blog with an association's name that is clearly written by members without association approval of each post would be included.

For the three somewhat ambiguous requirements (English, liblog, not an official blog), my usual rule is "when in doubt, leave it in." There are certainly some blogs included in this study that might be considered official blogs and a few that are not exclusively English.

Building the Universe

I started with the spreadsheet from the previous study—including liblogs that had been included in 2007-2008 but didn't meet narrower criteria for 2007-2009. Current filters (English, not official, still visible) yielded 563 liblogs and 62 exclusions. My own set of blog subscriptions (in Bloglines) added 43 additional liblogs and nine more exclusions.

Checking and rechecking half a dozen liblog directories, including Salem Press's lists (which yielded a *lot* of liblogs I'd never encountered) added 415 additional liblogs—and 426 more exclusions. At this point, there were just over one thousand liblogs and just under 500 exclusions. Two more directories, totaling 681 entries, yielded 275 possibilities that became 49 more liblogs and 226 more exclusions.

Then I started gathering and updating metrics for those liblogs—and copying blogrolls when the blogrolls appeared to be library-related and weren't so long as to be unmanageable. That process yielded considerably more than 2,000 possible candidates, which boiled down to some 900 blogs I hadn't already checked—which, after checking, yielded enough new liblogs and exclusions to bring the totals to 1,277 liblogs and 1,308 exclusions.

Finally, I asked for new names on my blog and a couple of lists and accidentally encountered one or two new liblogs that weren't in any of the other sources. One or two liblogs disappeared as I was checking metrics. The final total: 1,304 liblogs and 1,327 exclusions.

Is this the *complete* universe? Almost certainly not. I didn't check every blogroll (that would have involved checking literally tens of thousands of blogs, almost all of them outside the library field). Some liblogs don't show up anywhere: Nobody links to them, they're not in any directory, they're not in any blogroll. I'd *guess* this is at least 90% of the English-language liblog universe as it existed on May 31, 2010, but I could be wrong.

The universe keeps changing. If I rechecked all 1,304 liblogs on, say, October 10, 2010, I can be sure some previously-visible blogs would have disappeared (turning into parking pages, spam blogs or protected blogs, or yielding a "Blog removed" page from WordPress, Blogger and similar hosts)—most likely at least half a dozen and fewer than 50.

What about the Exclusions?

I categorized each exclusion as I checked it. Here's a tabular version of why blogs are excluded, followed by notes on each category—noting that a

blog could be excluded for more than one reason, but I only chose one.

Reason	Count
Broken	2
Empty	21
Malware	1
Not a blog	67
Not English	160
New	12
Not library-related	506
Not visible	306
Official	132
Podcast	1
Renamed	118

Table 2.1: Exclusions

Notes on the categories:

➢ **Broken** blogs were there but didn't work, for one reason or another.

➢ **Empty** blogs had pages and possibly banners, but no posts whatsoever.

➢ **Malware** blog—fortunately singular—attempted to infect my computer with some form of malware. I ran a full scan and used multiple disinfection tools, removing three different pieces of malware. (The blog was "Information Knot"; it may since have been fixed or deleted.)

➢ **Not a blog:** These didn't seem to be blogs but had been included in blogrolls.

➢ **Not English:** Most or all posts on the first page were in languages other than English.

➢ **New:** Liblogs where the very first post appeared on June 1, 2010 or later. If another study is done next year, they'll be included. It's heartening to see *some* additional liblogs being created!

➢ **Not library-related**: Neither written by "library people" (or archivists or museum people) nor with any apparent focus on libraries, archives, museums or librarianship. This is the largest category by far, which makes sense: Many libloggers include all their interests in a single big blogroll, and those interests will and should go beyond other liblogs.

➢ **Not visible**: The URL either yields a parking page, a "blog deleted" page, a 404 error or the like, or a request for a password. While some of these 306 blogs may never have been liblogs, I'd guess most of them are defunct liblogs.

➢ **Official**: Blogs from a library, group or other agency that appear to reflect official viewpoints, rather than blogs hosted by a group that have posts by group members.

➢ **Podcast**: Purely a list of podcasts with no other text.

➢ **Renamed:** Most of these are liblogs that have since changed names (and appear under the new names); some of them are names that appear in blogrolls but were never actual liblog names.

If you add "Not visible" to the set of blogs I examined, you come up with just over 1,600. Is it fair to say there have been 1,600 unofficial liblogs? Probably not—chances are there are others that existed so briefly that they never made it to a directory or blogroll.

Metrics and Completeness

The primary spreadsheet for this year's study has 24 columns, each representing some *direct* piece of information or metric for the blog in each row. There are quite a few more *derived* metrics—e.g., posts per month, comments per post.

With few exceptions, metrics are incomplete: I was either unable to collect information on some blogs or, in some cases, unwilling to spend the time to do so.

Here are the metrics and the number and percentage of blogs for which I was able to record each metric. Metrics appear in the order in which they are analyzed and discussed in this study.

Name, URL, Group and Category
These four metrics appear for all 1,304 blogs—in two cases because it wouldn't be possible to include the blog otherwise, in the other cases because they're assigned metrics.

➢ **Name**: The name of the blog, normally as it appears in the banner or page title. There's one case in which two blogs have exactly the same name, "@ the library"; I've added "[2]" to the younger of the two (the one at librarianwoes.wordpress.com).

➢ **URL**: The last known location for the blog. URLs generally don't appear in this study but will be in the portion of the spreadsheet that may eventually appear as an online table.

- ➢ **Group**: A number from 1 to 4, assigned based on a blog's activity, visibility and currency. Described further in the next section.
- ➢ **Type**: Not a detailed breakdown similar to that done in 2008 (e.g., law, science, museums, academic), but a three-way breakdown: "Books" (blogs primarily consisting of book or media reviews), "Technology" (blogs with technological slants) and "Other" (everybody else).

Where, How, Visibility and When

- ➢ **Country**: Country in which the blogger(s) resided when the blog was checked, when that was clear either from author information or from posts themselves (or when my request for information yielded results). Present for 1,216 of 1,304 blogs: 93%.
- ➢ **Software**: Blog software, only recorded for seven possibilities. Present for 1,251 of 1,304 blogs: 96%, a higher rate than I would have expected.
- ➢ **Google Page Rank:** A crude but easy indicator of blog visibility—the extent to which other blogs and websites refer to a given blog. Taken at the first time I checked a blog between June 1 and September 14, 2010. Technically, there's a number for every blog, but "0" is the same as "no information." This report does not *ever* associate a given blog with its GPR. Greater than 0 for 1,054 of 1,304 blogs: 81%.
- ➢ **Year and Month**: The year and month of the first post that I could locate or that is claimed in archive lists. Present for all blogs.
- ➢ **Longevity**: The number of months between the start of a blog and the last post on or before May 31, 2010. Also present for all blogs. (This isn't a derivative figure—you can't just subtract the month and year from June 2010—because many blogs aren't still active.)
- ➢ **Currency**: How current the most recent post was as of May 31, 2010, grouped into a small number of buckets. Present for all but seven blogs.

Activity

The remaining 13 metrics—and many derivative metrics—deal with blog activity: Number of posts, length of posts, number of comments. "Present" really means "I was able to calculate this without too much effort." What's too much? I wouldn't spend an hour on a metric for one blog; I *might* spend half an hour.

- ➢ **Total Posts**: Total number of posts from the start of the blog through May 31, 2010. Present for 1,186 of the 1,304 blogs: 91%.
- ➢ **Count2007**: Number of posts in March-May 2007. In this case, there are three categories: Blogs with countable posts, blogs with no posts, and blogs that didn't exist yet. (A few of the "no posts" blogs might be cases where I couldn't figure out how many posts there were.) 683 blogs have positive numbers (52%), 158 blogs started before June 2007 but have no recorded posts during this period (12%), and 463 blogs started after May 2007 (36%).
- ➢ **Length2007**: Total length of posts in March-May 2007. Of the 683 blogs with posts in 2007, 624 (91%) have recorded lengths; the others were difficult or impossible to measure, for various reasons.
- ➢ **Comments2007**: Number of comments in March-May 2007. 550 of the 683 blogs with countable posts had at least one comment (81%). 104 more blogs with countable posts had no comments, either because they weren't allowed or because nobody commented. The rest are cases where the comments couldn't be counted easily (29) or the blog began after June 2007.
- ➢ **Count2008**: How do you track blogs that have formally ceased or have no new posts? For now, it makes sense to count them as 0 posts, length and comments. For March-May 2008, 810 blogs have positive numbers (62%), 257 blogs existed but had no countable posts (20%), and 237 blogs started after May 2008 (18%).
- ➢ **Length2008**: 746 of the blogs with countable posts have recorded lengths (92%).
- ➢ **Comments2008**: 642 of the blogs with countable posts have at least one comment in March-May 2008 (79%). Another 129 with posts had no comments.
- ➢ **Count2009**: Number of posts March-May 2009. For this period, 876 blogs (67%) have positive numbers, 340 (26%) existed but had no countable posts (including quite a few that

were already moribund or dead), and 88 (7%) started after May 2009.

- ➤ **Length2009**: 790 of the blogs with countable posts have recorded lengths (90%).
- ➤ **Comments2009**: 664 of the blogs with countable posts have at least one comment in March-May 2009 (76%). Another 148 with posts had no comments.
- ➤ **Count2010**: Number of posts March-May 2010. For this period, 842 blogs (65%) have positive numbers. The remainder, 462 blogs, either skipped those months or were already moribund or dead.
- ➤ **Length2010**: 736 of the blogs with countable posts have recorded lengths (87%).
- ➤ **Comments2010**: 603 of the blogs with countable posts have at least one comment in March-May 2010 (72%). Another 180 with posts had no comments.

Metric	Present	Percentage
Country of blogger	1,216	93%
Blogging software	1,251	96%
Google Page Rank	1,054	81%
Total Posts	1,186	91%
Count2007	683	52%
Length2007	624	91%*
Comments2007	550	81%*
Count2008	810	62%
Length2008	746	92%*
Comments2008	642	79%*
Count2009	876	67%
Length2009	790	90%*
Comments2009	664	76%*
Count2010	842	65%
Length2010	736	87%*
Comments2010	603	72%*

*As percentage of blogs with counted posts for that year, noting that Comment count is for blogs with at least one comment.

Table 2.2: Metrics and Completeness

Metrics will be discussed in more detail in later chapters, as will the many derived metrics that appear in other chapters.

This Year and Last Year

How much broader is this study than last year's selective study? It varies—anywhere from half again as broad to more than twice as broad. The following table may help—and, for comparability, I've included blogs where comments were countable but there weren't any.

Metric	2010	2009	Percentage
Total blogs	1,304	521	250%
Count2007	683	449	152%
Length2007	624	412	151%
Comments2007	654	441	148%
Count2008	810	486	167%
Length2008	746	452	165%
Comments2008	771	476	162%
Count2009	876	434	202%
Length2009	790	394	201%
Comments2009	812	415	196%

Table 2.3: Blog counts for metrics in 2010 study compared to 2009 study

What: Types and Groups

In *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008*, I attempted to break down blogs by affiliation of bloggers—e.g., academic library, vendor, law library or librarian. I dropped that attempt in 2009; in most cases it didn't seem to add useful information.

As I was adding new blogs this year, I encountered quite a few that seemed to fall into a category or type, a type that wasn't well represented in previous versions: blogs devoted primarily to book reviews and news (or other media reviews and news). It was clear that these have different characteristics than most liblogs. I wondered whether "technology-oriented" blogs—ones that specifically note "2.0" or "tech" in the name or banner, or are otherwise fairly obviously technology-oriented—might differ from the run of blogs as well.

Type b blogs (books and other reviews) make up 9% of the universe, 115 in all—but that's 5.2 times as many as the 22 type b blogs in the 2009 study.

Type t blogs (technology) make up 31% of the universe, 405 in all, and that's 2.5 times as many as the 181 type t blogs in the 2009 study, almost exactly the norm.

Everything else—"type o" blogs (other)—make up 60% of the universe, 784 in all—2.3 times as many as last year.

You'll see breakdowns for type b and type t blogs in some metrics where there seems to be a significant difference. One clear difference for type

b blogs shows up in tables 2.4 and 2.5: Book review blogs tend to be strong survivors.

Groups

I developed a rough grouping of blogs based on activity, currency and visibility before I started gathering data—in part because I originally planned to do a superficial "broad look" at the whole universe and restrict the deeper look to a subset of blogs somewhat comparable to (but even more narrowly defined than) the 2009 study.

As time went by, I decided to apply the broad look to the whole universe (although, for obvious reasons, some metrics don't apply to one of the four groups) and to increase the number of groups from three to four.

Here's how the four groups are defined—based entirely on observation in June-September 2010:

➢ **Group 1**: These blogs must have Google Page Rank of 4 or higher and must have at least three posts between March 1, 2010 and May 31, 2010. 443 blogs (34% of the total) fall into this group. I'd call these the **core blogs**.

➢ **Group 2**: These blogs *either* have a Google Page Rank of 3 and at least one post between March 1, 2010 and May 31, 2010, *or* have a Google Page Rank 4 or higher, but have only one or two posts during the quarter. 207 blogs (16% of the total) fall into this group. I'd call these **less active visible blogs**.

➢ **Group 3**: These blogs don't fall into Groups 1 or 2 but had at least one blog within the year ending May 31, 2010—that is, the most recent post is on or after June 1, 2009. This is a hodgepodge, as it combines some very active blogs with no GPR (which can happen for several reasons—e.g., few of the *Library Journal/School Library Journal* blogs have GPRs) with a bunch of blogs that either have very little activity or have been abandoned within the past year. 364 blogs (28% of the total) fall into this group. Call these **also alive**.

➢ **Group 4**: These blogs had at least one post visible on the web—but no posts between June 1, 2009 and May 31, 2010. (A few of them have come back to life since May 31.) I'd guess 80% to 90% of these blogs are defunct, but haven't actually been removed from the web. Call these **mostly defunct**.

Table 2.4 breaks blogs down into groups (columns) and types (rows):

Group	1	2	3	4	Total
Type					
b	57	14	35	9	115
o	235	139	218	192	784
t	151	54	111	89	405
Total	443	207	364	290	1304

Table 2.4: Blogs by group and type

The combination of Groups 1 and 2, 650 blogs, is roughly comparable to the 2009 study group of 521 blogs (except that the 2009 study excluded GPR 3 and included quite a few blogs now regarded as official).

It's interesting but coincidental that Groups 1 and 2 and Groups 3 and 4 are each almost precisely half of the universe. Group definitions were made without regard to actual numbers before the universe of blogs was understood.

Table 2.5 is the same breakdown as Table 2.4—but by percentages. It's important to note that each percentage in the first four columns is a percentage of the total *for that row*—that is, 50% of type b blogs are in group 1.

Percentage	1	2	3	4	Total
b	50%	12%	30%	8%	9%
o	30%	18%	28%	24%	60%
t	37%	13%	27%	22%	31%
Total	34%	16%	28%	22%	100%

Table 2.5: Blog percentages by group and type

As with types, you'll see some group breakdowns in metrics where it appears useful, most often to differentiate Group 1 from the rest of the universe.

Averages and Medians

Averages are mostly meaningless when discussing liblogs: The universe is far too heterogeneous. I do mention averages whenever it seems appropriate or when there's a need to point out just how heterogeneous the liblog landscape actually is. When used, "average" carries its standard meaning: The sum of all the values for a given metric divided by the number of items carrying that metric. So the average of 1, 89, and 900 is 330—and that's about as meaningful an average as most liblog metrics would yield.

Medians can sometimes be more meaningful. The median of a group is the value at which as many members of the group have a higher value as have a lower value—it's the center as you're counting.

Quintiles and Other Notes

I use *quintiles* extensively in looking at metrics. Quintiles break a population down into five groups based on a particular metric. So, for example, when looking at number of posts in March-May 2010, the first quintile is the (roughly) 20% of blogs with the most posts, the second quintile the 20% of blogs with more posts than average (60%-80%), the third quintile (40%-60%) blogs with roughly average number of posts, fourth quintile (20%-40%) blogs with fewer posts than average, and fifth quintile (0%-20%) blogs with the fewest posts. I say "roughly" because it makes no sense to split two blogs with the same number of posts between two quintiles, so quintiles can vary in size.

Why quintiles? Because they provide a compact picture of a universe that's not *too* compact—one that allows for a meaningful "average" range. When you split a population into four parts, the average is split badly. No matter how little an individual differs from the median, it's forced into the second or third quartile. With quintiles, there's a broad "average group"—the third quintile.

Most quintile tables provide the median for each quintile. That allows you to look at, for example, the top 10% in a category: The median for Quintile 1 marks the breakpoint between the top 10% and the second 10%.

Triplets

Quintiles are great for looking at overall distribution and for pointing up how an individual blog fits into the universe of blogs. They're not so great for certain other purposes, including change patterns involving more than one metric or more than one change period.

When looking at some of those patterns, I'll use triplets rather than quintiles, where a triplet divides the universe into three parts: Significantly increased, Roughly unchanged, and Significantly decreased. I use 20% as the cutoff point for significance. So, for example, for post counts from 2009 to 2010, the triplets would be blogs that had at least 20.1% more posts in 2010 than in 2009, those that had 80% to 120% as many, and those with 79.9% or less.

Why March-May?

When measuring blog activity, you need to strike a balance between a long enough sample period to be meaningful and a short enough period so it's feasible to do the metrics. Three months seems to be a good compromise.

You want a three-month period when most bloggers are reasonably likely to be active, regardless of the type of library or activity. That argues against summer months (June-August) and heavy vacation months (November and December).

January is problematic, both because it's partly a vacation month and because of ALA Midwinter, one of two megaconferences that can skew blogging activity. That leaves two possible three-month slots: February through April or March through May. The latter period is a little longer, and in the U.S. each of those three-month periods has one three-day weekend, so I chose the longer quarter. (Yes, there are significant library conferences in the March-May period, but that's true for every quarter.)

(If you read *But Still They Blog*, you've read this section already—it's copied with almost no revision.)

The Rest of the Study

Is this liblog landscape the totality of English-language liblogs? Absolutely not: Some have disappeared and some just don't show up either on blogrolls or in directories and lists.

I do believe thus study includes most of them, probably at least 90% of those that are still visible. If so, it's reasonable to suggest that there are around 800 to 900 active liblogs at any time in recent years.

The rest of the study looks at the landscape as it appears now and, in some cases, as it's changed over time.

First we'll look at the software used for liblogs, where liblogs came from, when they began and how long they've lasted. Then we'll look at *overall* posts—a new metric—in two ways: The totality of posts and the average posts per month over the life of blogs.

After that, three chapters look at one category of metric as it appears during the four March-May quarters studied to date and as it's changed. First there are posts. Then come blog length—and, more significantly, the average length of each post

in a blog. Finally, there are conversations: The total comments for a blog and the average number of comments per post.

Additional chapters look at patterns of change involving the three key metrics (posts, length per post, comments per post), standouts and standards—blogs that stand out for one reason or another, and correlations and miscellaneous notes.

> If you're reading this, you're reading Chapter 2 of *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2010* in late draft form as it appears in the December 2010 *Cites & Insights*. To see Chapter 1, to see the final version of this chapter, for an index to blogs named in this book and to help support future research, buy *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2010* in book form (trade paperback or PDF download) when it's announced in late 2010 or early 2011.

Offtopic Perspective
Mystery Collection, Part 3

That's right—Part 3: Discs 13-18 of this 60-disc, 250-movie megacollection. Will *C&I* be around long enough for me to complete these little essays (which should take three or four more years)? I make no prediction.

Disc 13

The Mandarin Mystery, 1936, b&w. Ralph Staub (dir.), Eddie Quinlan, Charlotte Henry, Rita la Roy, Wade Boteler, Franklin Pangborn, George Irving, Kay Hughes. 1:06 [0:53]

> This one's a charmer—a relatively short, fast-paced Ellery Queen mystery (loosely) based on *The Chinese Orange Mystery*. A young woman arrives in New York with a uniquely rare stamp she's agreed to sell to a doctor—who is investing his niece's trust fund in rare stamps. As she's arriving, she runs into Ellery Queen (Quinlan), a charming young PR man who was hoping to meet another woman but who will gladly chase after whoever's available.

> The stamp's stolen before she can take it to the doctor; then she believes she's retrieved it—from a dead thief (murdered in a locked room). Inspector Queen (Ellery's father) arrives and the two of them, in very different ways, investigate a growing web of crimes including a second murder and stamp forgery, with enough suspects to make your head spin. Snappy dialogue, fast-moving, pretty decent acting (with Franklin Pangborn a hoot as

the nervous hotel manager), in all a good time. It's clearly a second feature/B movie, but a fun one—even with 13 minutes missing. $1.25.

High Voltage, 1929, b&w. Howard Higgin (dir.), William Boyd, Carole Lombard, Owen Moore, Phillips Smalley, Billy Bevan, Diane Ellis. 1:03.

> Already reviewed as part of the *50 Movie Pack Hollywood Legends*. Here's what I said in Cites & Insights 9:1 (January 2009):

>> An odd title for an odd short flick with a fine cast. The setup requires a fair amount of disbelief: A coach or bus apparently going from Sacramento to Reno during a huge snowstorm. When it stops for gas, the station attendant says they'll never make it through and should stop there, but the blowhard driver says he can make it. Passengers include one banker, one young woman on the way to meet her fiancée and a cop taking a woman (Carole Lombard) back East to serve out a prison sentence. The last two passengers are on their way to catch a train, as is (I believe) the young woman. The film is set in a time when there are not only buses but airplanes—but, apparently, either no train running from Sacramento east or the train's so unreliable that it makes more sense to ride a bus out into a huge snowstorm. I suppose there was such a period, but it's a little implausible.

>> Naturally, the bus gets stuck. Somehow, it's 40 miles to the nearest city or town—but there's a church close enough so the stranded group can see it and make their way there. Where they find a hobo (William Boyd), who (it turns out) is on the lam. (You may know William Boyd by the character he played in about 70 movies and 40 TV shows starting in 1935: Hopalong Cassidy. He's a lot darker here!)

>> That's the setup. The hobo has food but probably not enough for the ten days he estimates they'll be trapped (based on nothing obvious). There's jockeying for position, shoving around, threats…and mostly lots of talk and very little of anything else, although the hobo (who pretty much takes command) does manage to push them all out to get some fresh air, leading to two of them falling through ice (and being rescued). The hobo starts to go off in the night with the woman on her way back to prison (he knows of a ranger station ten miles away)—but when a plane starts circling overhead, he can't go through with abandoning the others, and

they agree to serve their time and move on from there.

So I guess it's a drama of tension among half a dozen stranded types. I suppose, but hardly enough tension to justify the title. Reasonably well acted. Some film damage. One real oddity: The opening credits refer to the characters as archetypes—The Boy, The Girl, The Detective, and so on—even though they all have names in the movie. Knowing the date does make a difference: This is a *very* early talkie. I'll give it $1.

The Man Who Had Influence, 1950, b&w. Franklin J. Schaffner (dir.), Stanley Ridges, Robert Sterling, King Calder, Anne Bancroft. 0:59.

Not really a movie at all, and the sleeve's clear about this: It's a 1950 episode of Studio One, an early live dramatic TV series—presented here including the three Westinghouse commercials within the story. It's presumably a kinescope, that is, a film made from the TV broadcast, which helps explain the generally poor video quality (and sometimes-poor audio quality).

The plot: We have an Influential Wealthy Lawyer—who's backing a Senate candidate instead of running himself because he's more powerful behind the scenes—and his absurdly overprivileged son, who's always gotten away with everything because of his father and who just flunked out of college. He's a drunkard but somehow has a fiancée who really should know better (she's the daughter of the senatorial candidate).

After he comes home, he goes out with his fiancée, drinks too much, makes a play for the cute cigarette girl (his fiancée is *used* to his leaving with somebody else!)...and the next thing we know, it's the next morning, the car's not at home, he is but doesn't know what's happened. What's happened is a car crash and a dead cigarette girl, who he abandoned at the scene.

That's the setup. The rest has to do with just how much influence the father has and how he gets it. It involves conversations with a cop who seems to spend his time *in the jail cell* with the son, playing cards and eventually bemoaning the fact that he shoulda been police chief but couldn't be bought by the father...and a sort of redemption. Sort of.

I guess it's golden age drama. Other than the achievement of doing this live, I can't say that it's that wonderful—hammy, simplistic, and almost hard to watch. I'll give it $0.75.

The Strange Woman, 1946, b&w. Edgar G. Ulmer (dir.), Hedy Lamarr, George Sanders, Louis Hayward, Gene Lockhart, Hillary Brooke. 1:40.

Bangor, Maine, 1824, a mostly-lawless logging town where the town drunk's daughter is a handful—including an early scene where she nearly drowns a boy, then makes it look as though she saved him from drowning. She grows into a beauty, determined to marry a wealthy man—and manages, in the person of a much older man (the father of the boy, now away at college).

In the course of events, she seduces the son and makes it clear that she considers the father (her husband) a nuisance—and, when the son comes back alone from a trip to the logging camp, rejects him out of hand. She has eyes for the fiancée of her friend—and what Jenny wants, Jenny gets. The son turns drunkard, and eventually hangs himself—after telling the person who's now her husband (and heads up the logging-and-shipping operation she inherited) what happened.

There's more—specifically, a revivalist in buckskins from Ohio, whose third service is "The Strange Woman" and who seems to be speaking directly to her. Things do not lead to a happy ending—and, given Jenny's sociopathic nature, it's hard to see how they could wind up well. Hedy Lamarr gives a fine performance as a mostly-affectless beautiful woman plowing a path through all around her. George Sanders is upstanding and noble as her eventual husband, who stands by her to the end. The movie's slow moving and there are a few glitches. Not great, not bad; I'll give it $1.50.

Disc 14

Half a Sinner, 1940, b&w. Al Christie (dir.), Heather Angel, John King, Constance Collier, Walter Catlett, Tom Dugan, Robert Elliott, Clem Bevans, Emma Dunn, Henry Brandon. 0:59.

What a charmer! Sure, it's a mystery of sorts—but it's also a romantic comedy, nearly a screwball comedy and a caper movie. The plot's really very simple: A 25-year-old schoolteacher, tired of wearing sensible clothes, glasses and "flats" (really modest heels), buys a nice well-fitting dress and hat and shocks her Granny by noting that she's going to go wild—she's going to *have tea downtown!*

One thing leads to another, and the next we know, she's stolen a limo (that was already stolen), been flagged down by a handsome young man whose car has apparently broken down, discovered that there's a corpse in the back seat, encountered (and escaped) the law and the crooks...and, well, it's a fast-moving, satisfying plot. I don't know any of the actors, but they all seem to be having a ball with this funny, fluffy flick. Notably, it's based on a Dalton Trumbo story, before Trumbo was forced

underground by HUAC. The print is excellent, and I give it the highest I'd give for an under-one-hour item: $1.25.

Guest in the House, 1944, b&w. John Brahm (dir.), Anne Baxter, Ralph Bellamy, Aline MacMahon, Ruth Warwick, Scott McKay. 2:01 [1:40]

No summary review because after 20 minutes I decided I wasn't willing to watch this—life is too short. The title character was so absurdly strange, in a thoroughly unpleasant way, and the other characters so...well, unengaging, that I couldn't see watching the whole thing. (Sound problems and a strange, presumably-intentional, bit of having waves of light sweep through the interiors periodically didn't help.)

Looking at IMDB reviews, "noirish melodrama" may be the right label. I found it uninteresting and simultaneously unpleasant. (Sorry, but I watch movies to be entertained; if a movie is neither entertaining nor engaging nor educational, I've got better uses for my time.) Your mileage may vary.

Ten Minutes to Live, 1932, b&w. Oscar Micheaux (dir., story, screenplay), Lawrence Chenault, A.B. DeComatheire, Laura Bowman, Willor Lee Guilford, Tressie Mitchell. 0:58.

This one's a true curiosity—and it might have been better included in the Musicals set, since a substantial portion of the movie is the stage show at an upscale Harlem cabaret, with a troupe of eight frenetic dancers (apparently from the real Cotton Club), some singer-dancers, a hot band and a very odd set of comedians. There *is* a mystery of sorts—but, possibly due to technical problems, it's difficult to make much of it. (I'll never quite understand why Harlem nightclubs had black comics performing in blackface, but I assume that was authentic.)

What we have here is a black film from the early 1930s (with an all African-American cast and targeting a black audience), one that appears to have been filmed mostly as a silent picture (except for the musical numbers), with some dialogue added later. Specifically, in one long sequence, the *only* dialogue comes from off-camera performers who appear to be reading from a script they've never seen before. What we also have is a badly framed picture that loses enough on all four sides to make important pieces of text illegible and with sound occasionally so bad that dialogue becomes nearly unintelligible. Oh, and once in a while the picture jumps out of synch, so there's a black line midpicture with the lower half of a frame above and the upper half below.

I suspect this is a rarity (since most of these films never made it into mainstream theaters and were probably not preserved very well), and the musical sequences are certainly interesting. The acting...well, as I say, it's an odd blend of sound and silent picture, and probably done with no real budget. Worth seeing as a historic curiosity and for the vintage musical numbers, but I couldn't give it more than $0.75.

Fear in the Night, 1947, b&w. Maxwell Shane (dir.), Paul Kelly, DeForest Kelley, Ann Doran, Kay Scott, Charles Victor, Robert Emmett Keane. 1:12.

Two mysteries for the price of one!

The first is the noir mystery within the film. A young man (played by a 27-year-old DeForest Kelley), a bank cashier who lives in a hotel and whose sister and brother-in-law live nearby, finds himself in a strange and deadly dream...then wakes up to find items suggesting that it wasn't just a dream, which would mean he's murdered someone (in self defense). He seeks out his brother-in-law, a police detective, who tells him to shake it off.

Later, he (and his brother in law, and his sister, and his girlfriend) finds himself in a big house he shouldn't know about—and there's the room in his dreams, with a bloodstained wall where he thought he'd left a corpse. Suddenly his brother-in-law assumes he's a cold-blooded killer and the whole "dream" thing was a ruse.

That's as much of the plot as I'll provide. It's well acted and keeps moving, even though you'll have figured out half of the twist (and maybe all of it) well before it's revealed. A good film. Kelley's second film role and first starring role, and he does a fine job. (Apparently remade in the 50s as *Nightmare*, with Edward G. Robinson.)

The other mystery? The sleeve description— which makes this out to be a The Shadow/Lamont Cranston film about "the murder of a wealthy gentleman who was about to change his will." There was no Lamont Cranston involved and, while there is a wealthy gentleman, he's not a murder victim. (Usually in these cases, the sleeve describes another flick with the same title but, according to IMDB, there's no Lamont Cranston movie with a title anything like "Fear in the Night.") I've seen this before (the wrong flick being described on the sleeve), but usually they'd also get the star wrong—which they don't. But that's trivial. Pretty good film noir: $1.50.

Disc 15

The Wrong Road, 1937, b&w. James Cruze (dir.), Richard Cromwell, Helen Mack, Lionel Atwill, Horace McMahon, Marjorie Main. 1:02 [0:53]

An odd little B movie, not without its charms. Open on a young couple dancing in a fancy nightclub and discussing their plans. She graduated from college and found that her father had squandered his fortune (consider the year!), and her only real plan was to become part of Moneyed Society. He graduated assuming he'd get a $10,000/year job (equivalent to more than $145,000 in 2009 dollars) but that disappeared and now he's making $25/week as a bank clerk—and is on his way out to make way for the boss's relative. They're both Too Good to Work, so they have a solution: He's going to steal a bunch of the bank's money, they'll hide it, they won't deny the crime, and when they get out of prison—Shazam!

They do this—basically, he just hands her $100,000 in a phony transaction (which, if it really was equal to $1.45 million, wouldn't have them Set For Life but would be a nice starting point) and neither of them deny the crime. But the insurance investigator counsels them that this won't work out well—the money's traceable, so they'd have to sell it to a fence, leaving maybe $40,000, and, oh, by the way, they're not likely to get two years, they're likely to get ten. Is $2,000/year per person really worth it—even if he doesn't capture the money when they get out? (Throughout, this hardnosed investigator—Lionel Atwill—is more of a wise old uncle than anything else.)

But they're intent on it. Two years later when they're initially up for parole, the investigator sees that they get the parole with some stringent conditions (e.g., they can't get married). Meanwhile, the guy's cellmate has gotten out and wants some (or all) of the money…and the uncle they'd sent it to (sealed inside a music box) has died bankrupt, with his estate being auctioned off. Oh, and the insurance investigator is still on their trail and still counseling them to give it up.

You can probably guess how it ends. It's an odd little morality tale. They keep saying "We earned that money," but, well, the weed of crime bears bitter fruit. In some ways, it's a pointless little movie, but I found it enjoyable as a trifle. Still, given the length and general lack of plausibility, I can't give it more than $0.75.

The Naked Kiss, 1964, b&w. Samuel Fuller (dir., also screenplay and producer), Constance Towers, Anthony Eisley, Michael Dante, Virginia Grey, Patsy Kelly, Marie Devereux, Karen Conrad. 1:39.

Truly a strange duck. Before the titles, we get a hot sequence where a half-naked woman is thwacking a man with her purse, eventually flooring him (he's obviously drunk), taking $800 out of his wallet, removing $75, tossing the rest back…and, after

getting dressed, checking her makeup and, by the way, putting the wig back on her bald head (he'd ripped it off), leaving.

After the titles, she's getting off the bus in a town where the police captain deals with thugs by sending them out of town—and spots her as a prostitute, availing himself of her services as a demonstration (then telling her to get out of town, cross the state line and river to his friend's bordello, and she'll be fine). She decides to go straight and turns out to be a wonderful nurse's assistant at the local pediatric hospital, where she can get the kids on crutches and in wheelchairs to perk up.

That's just the start. She meets and gets involved with The Man—the scion of the town's founding family—with only the noblest of motives. To say much more would give the plot away, and it's a fairly involved one. I'm not sure you'd call the ending happy, but it could be worse. In between, we get a mix of fairly slow, "natural" timing and some slightly odd acting. Oh: It's also widescreen. On balance, I'll give it $1.00.

Affair in Monte Carlo, (orig. *24 Hours of a Woman's Life*), 1952, color (b&w on this disc). Victor Saville (dir.), Merle Oberon, Leo Genn, Richard Todd. 1:30 [1:04].

Previously seen in *50 Movie Hollywood Legends* and reviewed in the January 2009 *Cites & Insights*. Clearly the same short "it says Technicolor on the movie but it's black-and-white on this print" version. Here's my review:

Merle Oberon is excellent in this tale of sudden romance and gambling addiction, told mostly as a flashback—but there are two problems. The biggest one is that this seems like "**scenes** from an affair"—at 1:03, it's much far too short for its story and has gaps in continuity. Given the fairly slow pacing of the movie, that's particularly unfortunate. Noting IMDB after rating this, I see that's what's happened: The movie should be 90 minutes long, the U.S. version was trimmed to 75 minutes (why?), and this version—apart from losing its color—is down to a mere 64 minutes.

The other—well, the credits list a Technicolor colour consultant, but there's no color in the movie as presented here. The scenery would be much nicer and the film more convincing in color. It doesn't have the qualities of great b&w cinematography. (Actually, it looks like desaturated color, which is what it apparently is.) Nice little story, good scenery, some good acting, but ultimately I'm generous at $1.00.

Sinners in Paradise, 1938, b&w. James Whale (dir.), Madge Evans, John Boles, Bruce Cabot, Marion Martin, Gene Lockhart. 1:05 [1:03]

Eight people board a lavish four-propeller seaplane to cross the Pacific Ocean from California to China (with, presumably, a stop in Hawaii). We learn just a bit of their stories early in the flight—with people standing around the cabin (which consists of seats across tables) during takeoff, and no signs that there even *are* seatbelts—and a bit more as the flight continues.

The plane crashes near an almost-deserted tropical island, hundreds of miles from the mainland. "Almost": there's a handsome, perfectly dressed man in a little (well, not so little—he can comfortably seat all the rest at breakfast) grass shack, with a Chinese companion/servant. He tells the rest they'll need to make their own way—and although he has a boat, he's not willing to take them anywhere, even for very large bribes.

That's the basics. The eight are a quite odd lot: Two weapons dealers, two criminals (one man, one woman), a wealthy industrial heiress, a nurse planning to fly back to China for relief work against her soon-to-be-ex-husband's wishes, an ex-state-senator, and a 50-year-old woman planning to surprise her son in China. After the resident relents and agrees to take five of them to the mainland (the boat can only hold six), the weapons dealers force the servant to take them instead (killing the "elderly" woman in the process). The rest of the movie, short as it is, deals with the changes wrought by three months of making things work. It's not all that major, and there's no real ending, but it's not bad. $1.00.

Disc 16

The Phantom Fiend, 1932, b&w. Maurice Elvey (dir.), Ivor Novello, Elizabeth Allan, A.W. Baskcomb, Barbara Everest, Jack Hawkins. 1:25 [1:02]

Women keep getting murdered in London at call boxes. A phone operator, who may have heard one of the murders, lives at home with her parents—who also rent out a room, when they can. She has a sort-of sometimes boyfriend who's a reporter. They manage to rent the room to a quiet foreign man who doesn't like having women's portraits hung in the room, plays a fine piano and also owns (but never seems to play) a violin.

He makes friends with the young woman—but in a mysterious way. Meanwhile, an agent claims to know who the fiend ("the avenger?") is—and the father concludes that it's the roomer. Since the roomer is such an obvious suspect from the moment he appears in the picture, it should be ob-

vious that Not All Is As It Seems, as is revealed in the final four minutes of a remarkably slow-moving flick. There's a little domestic humor, but...

Atmospheric foggy-London photography, so-so picture, staticky sound, acceptable acting. I wonder how much is missing in this considerably-abbreviated version of the original? I couldn't get terribly excited, but I suppose it's worth $1.00.

The Sleeping Tiger, 1954, b&w. Joseph Losey (dir.), Dirk Bogarde, Alexis Smith, Alexander Knox, Hugh Griffith, Patricia McCarron. 1:29 [1:27]

The setup: guy tries to rob a psychotherapist at gunpoint, but the shrink—a former army man—takes the gun away from him. And, instead of turning him in to the police, takes him home for a six-month experiment: "See whether we can turn things around, or go back to the cops and jail." The housekeeper's appalled and leaves (not without a little rough stuff from the guy, who doesn't want her to leave). The wife, perhaps a trifle distant from her brilliant husband who's always off lecturing (she's American, he's British, the film's set in London), is hesitant at first but...well, goes riding with him, then starts falling for him.

Things end badly (particularly for her). Much of the movie is slow moving, but it's reasonably interesting and well acted overall. An oddity: The sleeve gives the star as Alexis Smith (the wife), but I'd say Dirk Bogarde (the brooding young man—he was 34 at the time) is the real star here. Either it's the new TV or this is an unusually good print, but the tonal qualities were very good. There are, sad to say, some missing pieces—whole lines of dialog, not just chops, although it only adds up to two minutes overall. Still, I think it's worth $1.25.

Monsoon, 1943, b&w. Edgar G. Ulmer (dir.), John Carradine, Gale Sondergaard, Sidney Toler, Frank Fenton, Veda Ann Borg, Rita Quickley, Rick Vallin. Original title: *Isle of Forgotten Sins*. 1:22 [1:16]

I'd already seen this movie on another set, and didn't rewatch the entire movie. Here's what I said in 2008:

[This movie is about] greed, gold, diving and weather. It starts in a South Seas gambling hall/brothel and winds up in a similar establishment. In between? Better than you might expect, partly because there really are no heroes among this strong cast. $1.25.

Slightly Honorable, 1939, b&w. Tay Garnett (dir.), Pat O'Brien, Edward Arnold, Broderick Crawford, Ruth Terry, Alan Dinehart, Claire Dodd, Phyllis Brooks, Eve Arden. 1:25.

The opening credits and music underneath make it clear that this is a comedy—but it's also a mystery, and a fairly involved one at that. We have an honest lawyer who's out to dethrone a group of crooked politicians and businesspeople, and whose client and good friend is murdered—presumably by one of the bad guys. We have a couple more murders, a singer/dancer (who tends to go flat, but is a great dancer) who's a little underage and given to malapropisms, incompetent cops, the inimitable Eve Arden as a secretary (and victim) and lots more.

Thoroughly enjoyable, with a remarkable cast. The print's generally very good. I give this one $1.75.

Disc 17

Love from a Stranger, 1937, b&w. Rowland V. Lee (dir.), Ann Harding, Basil Rathbone, Binnie Hale, Bruce Seton. 1:26.

A young woman whose fiancé is about to return from a three-year stretch of work in the Sudan wins the French lottery (for about 90,000£, or about $25 million in contemporary purchasing power) just as he's returning, and wants to go see the world. Two things happen almost simultaneously: A suave man shows up in response to her ad to sublet the flat—and her fiancé returns, won't give up his post on returning to England just to follow her around the continent, and gets in an argument with her, stalking off.

Next thing we know, the woman (and her friend and flatmate) is on the ship to Paris—as is the suave stranger, who of course makes a play for her. Then they're in Paris, her ex shows up to apologize...and now she's married to the stranger. Shortly thereafter, he borrows 5,000£ to buy a house in the country (a house which, his wife later discovers, was up for sale for half that amount—still, at around $700,000, a goodly sum)...and gets her to sign a form for the loan without reading it.

Then we get the husband acting very strangely and the suspicion that he might just be a serial wife-killer who gets his wives to sign (gasp) papers giving their husbands control over their money. There's more to the plot than this, and the ending is...interesting. The whole thing seems wildly overwrought, but maybe that's the intention. I'm torn on this one: Basil Rathbone seems to be chewing the scenery (as does Ann Harding) and the whole thing's a bit implausible, but it has its merits. $1.25.

The Evil Mind (or *The Clairvoyant*), 1934, b&w. Maurice Elvey (dir.), Claude Rains, Jane Baxter, Athole Stewart. 1:21 [1:08].

Reviewed in the January 2009 *Cites & Insights* as part of 50 Movie Hollywood Legends. Here's what I said at the time—and, once again, the "starring" line is for Fay Wray rather than the more deserving Claude Rains.

Maximus works as a stage clairvoyant, using his wife's clues to say what she's holding—until, in the presence of another woman, he suddenly makes a real and correct prediction. This happens a couple of times; he gets a big London stage engagement but the producer's unhappy because he can't do big predictions to order. Meanwhile, his wife's becoming jealous of the young woman. This all leads up to his unwilling prediction of a tunneling catastrophe—one that, when it comes true, causes him to be put on trial on the basis that his prediction caused the catastrophe.

There's little point in saying more about the plot. It's not bad, actually, and there's a nice twist involving why he only makes accurate predictions under certain circumstances. The print is jumpy at points, 13 minutes are missing and the soundtrack's damaged at points as well, but not so much as to ruin the picture. It's generally well-acted. While the sleeve lists Fay Wray (the wife) as the "legend," I'd say Claude Rains' faintly bizarre and very well played Maximus deserves more credit. The original title ("The Clairvoyant") suits this better, as there's nothing evil in Rains' predictions. I'll give it $1.00.

One Frightened Night, 1935, b&w. Christy Cabanne (dir.), Charles Grapewin, Lucien Littlefield, Mary Carlisle, Regis Toomey, Arthur Hohl, Fred Kelsey, Evalyn Knapp, Hedda Hopper. 1:06.

Another short mystery-comedy family-inheritance movie, and a good one. This time, instead of a dead Mean Old Man Who Nobody's Sorry To See Go, we have a *live* MOMWNSTG, faced with a supposed midnight increase in inheritance taxes—so he's about to distribute his funds, $5 million of them (call that $77 million in today's dollars).

It all starts at dinner with his niece and her husband, a ne'er-do-well charming nephew, his female servant and his doctor—where, after baiting them generally for being what they are, he tells them, one by one, that each is about to receive $1 million. The fifth million? That goes to his attorney—but in all cases, it assumes that his long-lost granddaughter, who he hasn't seen for 20 years, doesn't show up (or she gets it all). Then, in comes the attorney...with his granddaughter.

Well now. As he's talking to her upstairs, a young woman battles the storm (*of course* it's a dark and

stormy night) to get to the house and announces herself as...his granddaughter. With her colleague in a vaudeville magic act showing up soon, once he gets the car parked. She just dropped by because her mother said she should. Unlike the first granddaughter (both with the same name), she doesn't have corroborating letters...but also unlike the first one (within five minutes of arriving), she's still alive.

That sets the scene. Add a police detective and sergeant, a couple of hidden passages and a whole bunch of red herrings, and you have a thoroughly entertaining hour. (A note about the IMDB listing: A claimed "goof" is, to my eye, a deliberate plot point—the utility folks managed to repair a downed pole, restoring power to the house.) Unfortunately, the picture has problems during the last five minutes, but it's still a lot of fun. $1.50

Prison Shadows, 1936, b&w. Robert F. Hill (dir.), Eddie Nugent, Lucille Lund, Joan Barclay, Forrest Taylor, Syd Saylor, Monte Blue. 1:06.

We open in a boxing ring with overhead shots and one guy winning in short order—and then cut to the reality: The boxing ring is in prison, and all the prisoners—including the fighters and their trainers—now head back to their cells. Ah, but as we soon find out (while the winner's trainer is alternating between rubbing down the winner, his cellmate, and drinking the rubbing alcohol), the winner's about to be paroled for his "crime": Killing an opponent by hitting him with a late punch from his lethal right hand (which he basically won't use in fights).

The plot escalates from there—with a woman who clearly loves him but he regards as a friend, a woman who is playing him along, playing his promoter along (of *course* he goes back into the fight game as soon as he's paroled) and either also playing a trainer/thug along or, maybe, actually involved with this one. Her thing is to win bets on fights by killing off the opponents. She comes off as mean-spirited throughout and it's hard to see just what makes her so seductive. In any case, we have two more deaths (involving a methodology that's basically—well, let's say improbable) and, eventually, a happy ending.

The plot's not terrible, but I find the tone of the whole thing absurd. The guy who's been in prison comes out and is relentlessly chipper (and hopelessly naïve), as though being an imprisoned felon was basically a vacation. Oh, except that he can't get married during the seven years of parole (?). It just doesn't work. That, and the generally lightweight acting (and missing frames here and

there, just enough to be annoying) bring this down to a subpar $0.75.

Disc 18

Inner Sanctum, 1948, b&w. Lew Landers (dir.), Charles Russell, Mary Beth Hughes, Dale Belding, Billy House, Fritz Leiber. 1:02.

A story within a story—with a twist on the outer story that I won't reveal. The inner story: Guy gets off a train, woman gets off after him, they argue, she winds up dead, he throws her on the rear platform of the departing train. Lots more stuff happens involving a kid, his mother, a boarding house, a semi-loose woman, a one-man newspaper and various small-town folk. Oh, and a flood that strands the guy in the little town.

It's OK, but nothing particularly special—the only real mystery is whether he'll get away with it and what will happen in the process. I guess it could be called noir; I found it mostly dispiriting. The print's good. As a minor B picture, it's worth maybe $0.75.

Gaslight, 1940, b&w (released in the U.S. as *The Murder in Thornton Square*). Thorold Dickinson (dir.), Anton Walbrook, Diana Wynyard, Frank Pettingell, Cathleen Cordell, Robert Newton. 1:24.

This is the original *Gaslight*, a British film—not the better-known American version with Charles Boyer and Ingrid Bergman filmed in 1944. (Supposedly MGM attempted to suppress this earlier version.) I haven't seen the later film, but this is essentially the same plot and based on the same play: That is, a man is driving his wife insane (or at least to the point where he can have her committed)—in this case so he can continue searching for rubies that he killed his aunt for, years ago in the same house.

In this version the husband is a sneering Victorian tyrant, a true villain, and the wife is neurotic enough to make the overall plot believable. Well played and a good print. Not quite a masterpiece, but very good. I'll give it $1.75.

The Last Mile, 1932, b&w. Samuel Bischoff (dir.), Preston Foster, Howard Phillips, George E. Stone, Neal Madison, Frank Sheridan. 1:15 [1:09]

Primarily a short death-row drama featuring eight prisoners, each in his own cell, and the guard watching over them all—although the surround is one person who's innocent (and the only one who survives). Lots of talk (and one execution early on, with the interesting variation that the prisoner's Jewish, so the prayers being spoken are different) followed by an attempted prison break and attendant action. Very much anti-death penalty, including a textual introduction from a prison warden.

> Not great, not terrible. It's a play on film, and feels that way. The print's missing six minutes and is choppy in places. I'll give it $1.00.

D.O.A., 1950, b&w. Rudolph Maté (dir.), Edmond O'Brien, Pamela Britton, Luther Adler, Beverly Garland, Lynn Baggett, William Ching, Henry Hart, Neville Brand. 1:23.

> A classic, or at least a minor classic. Guy stumbles into the homicide division of a police station, asks to see the person in charge, gives his name...and they're all ears. The rest of the story is flashbacks, and it's a doozy. The guy's an accountant from Banning, who'd gone to San Francisco for a little vacation (upsetting his girlfriend)...and who gets poisoned while he's there, with a "luminous poison" for which there's no cure but could leave him going for a day, two days, a week.
>
> The rest of the story is his attempt to find out who murdered him. It's a complicated story, but hangs together fairly well. To say any more might involve spoilers, and this movie's good enough that I won't do that. Well acted, well written, well directed. The print's not great, but the movie is—about as good as film noir gets. $2.00.

Summary

Although this group included one film I wasn't willing to finish, it's a strong group overall: One classic (*D.O.A.*), two near-classics (*Slightly Honorable* and *Gaslight*), three at $1.50, five at $1.25, and seven at $1—that's 18 that are at least pretty good, for a total of $23.25. Add in five more that are so-so at $0.75, and you get $27: pretty good for a tenth of this $50-or-so set.

My Back Pages
Another Mystery Ad

Here's another one: A full-page color ad in a high-end audio magazine where there's not a clue as to what's being advertised. This time, the ad is from Vitus Audio of Denmark, it shows an image of the world with some device flying around it with a fiery trail. The big type says "out of this world" and there's a one-paragraph quotation from a stereo writer about how "this stuff will dramatically improve the visual appeal of your listening room." Also, it will heighten your appreciation "for the very nature of music and particularly live music."

I haven't a clue as to what Vitus Audio makes. Four thumbnail pictures are no help at all. Ah, but at least there's a URL so you can check it out. The homepage is pushing a $25,000 preamp and $50,000/pair mono amp; I can't imagine how they'd "dramatically approve the visual appeal" of a listening room, but at $75,000 for amplification they'd dramatically change our savings accounts.

Let's explore further. There's a programmable remote control with no price given and the closing phrase "More details will follow during 1Q2009." I'm writing this on October 5, 2010—which is the start of 4Q2010, not a reassuring difference. There's some cable, with no price but stuff about changes to "keep pricing at it's lowest ever"—I know, proofreaders cost money. And there are various electronic products, none with prices or serious technical details. There are also PDFs of some reviews, none more recent than 2007, all making clear that this is expensive stuff.

I guess when you pay for full-page color ads that don't *say* anything, you have to charge a lot for your equipment.

Supertiny Power Plants?

The one-page "Ethonomics" piece in the June 2010 *Fast Company* doesn't have a question mark. It's a laudatory page looking at "energy harvesting" with six ways that "micromovements on any surface can be converted into clean energy by power-scavenging devices fitted with piezoelectric (PE) crystals."

Really? One example involves *digging up a highway* and inserting PE generators two inches below the blacktop. How much energy will this expensive, disruptive, pollution-causing action create? The company line—and the company's unlikely to be pessimistic—is that a half-mile-long installation in one lane, which would cost at least $500,000 (I'm guessing that's *way* low if you include all the disruption involved) "could create enough energy to meet the needs of 250 homes." That's $2,000 per home, which doesn't sound terrible—*if* it includes all costs and lifecycle issues.

The "walkway slabs" strike me as truly silly: One slab can "generate a steady 2.1 watt hours when positioned in heavy footfall zones." How long will it take to justify the material waste and energy cost of removing existing walkways and replacing them with these (and, of course, all the infrastructure)? There are others—including the idea of *harvesting your lung energy*, essentially one watt, to recharge pacemaker batteries. Which is the kind of odd spe-

cialized situation where this sort of thing might actually make sense. (Using high-energy fan celebrations in bleachers to power LED displays? At $50 to $100 per square foot? Well...)

Feeding Your…Oh, Look, A Squirrel!

Gary Dell'Abate is frequently good for a laugh in his "Gadget Gary" column in *Sound & Vision*—although I don't think that's his intention. In the September 2010 edition, he fairly drools over the Sony Dash, a $200 thing that connects to your wifi network, sits on a table or your nightstand or wherever, plugs in...and shows you *stuff* on its 7" screen, where "stuff" can be email, Netflix videos, weather, news, "one of 1,500-plus widgets." The way Dell'Abate uses it, it's sitting next to his computer with the screen "constantly scrolling and giving me info and updates"—in other words, providing a constant stream of interruptions to whatever Dell'Abate's actually working on. If you remember the Chumby, this thing is basically a modernized and less cutesy version of that, with a much larger screen.

I dunno. Personally, I'd abhor something that was constantly offering me different interruptions present in my peripheral vision; it would nearly assure that I'd never apply full concentration to anything. But that's me. I could suggest that the constant use of a Sony Dash while he's writing explains a *lot* about Dell'Abate's column, but that would be snarky.

Making Pretty Sounds

A letter in the June/July 2010 *The Absolute Sound* seems typical of the way most high-end coverage is going. The letter quotes an *approving* statement from a reviewer that a certain piece of very expensive equipment "tends to make everything sound beautiful," and says, "When someone spends this kind of money everything *should* sound beautiful."

The idea *used* to be that a really good stereo system should reproduce faithfully what's on the CD or LP or whatever. High fidelity, that is—fidelity to the original. That will make nasty recordings sound nasty and good recordings sound good. Apparently some people think that the job of stereo equipment is not to reproduce music but to *produce* music—to make everything "musical" or "beautiful" or whatever. So it goes.

Ad Overload in Augmented Reality

Why am I not surprised? Ginny Mies' "Skeptical Shopper" column in the August 2010 *PC World* gets all excited about augmented reality—you know, looking at your smartphone while its back-of-case camera is on and seeing all sorts of info overlaying the actual picture. Except, of course, that one big augmentation you're going to get is ads—e.g., "giant logos for Starbucks and McDonald's" if you're using Brightkite and are anywhere near one of their outlets—oh, and the local businesses that now seem so prominent in Google Maps and Google Street View. Let's review "free": *somebody* is paying for these applications...

But It *Must* Be Better!

I sometimes suspect that audio reviewers hear differences because they expect to hear them, although I can't prove that.

A brief piece in the October 2010 *The Absolute Sound* reviews Kimber Kable 12TC Loudspeaker Cable—Kimber Kable's newest, "relegating 8TC to a middle spot between he newcomer and the entry level 4TC." This time, it's not about *absurdly* expensive gear: As high-end cables go, even the 12TC is reasonable at $31/foot, while the 8TC is $20/foot. (You think those sound high compared to zipcord at, what $1/foot? *Serious* audiophile cables can cost $1,500/foot or more.)

Ah, but "During the first few days," the reviewer *couldn't hear differences* between the two cables. Since he *knew* that Ray Kimber always provides performance and value, *he listened harder*. And eventually, of course, heard a difference.