Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

T&QT Perspective

Trends and Forecasts

It's as predictable as the Winter Solstice: the ongoing trickle of articles on trends turns into a flood around the turn of each year, coupled with a healthy rush of forecasts—and a much smaller freshet of 'fessing up, as forecasters let us know how things worked out.

What *is* a trend—and how does it differ from a forecast? The dictionary's not much help here. Two senses of "trend" seem relevant: "a prevailing tendency or inclination" and "a current style or preference" (with "vogue" as a synonym). My sense is that most so-called trends these days are claims of near-future importance—assertions that Trend X is becoming more significant, than, say, Former Trend Y, and needs to be paid attention to.

"Forecast" is comparatively simple: "a prophecy, estimate, or prediction of a future happening or condition." (All definitions from *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*.) To me—if perhaps not to others—the distinction may be *falsifiability*. If I say "Open source matters in 2009," that's a trend. If I say "25% of libraries will switch to open source library systems by 2012," that's a forecast. You could argue that I was wrong about open source as a trend, but you couldn't *prove* me wrong—but in 2013, you could prove me wrong about the forecast. That's too neat, of course—some forecasts are mostly trend statements. But trend gurus tend to avoid specificity, rarely even saying X is *the most important* trend.

Let's look at a few of the many trend statements for 2010. We'll also look at the flipside of trendiness: Deathspotting—assertions that X or Y is (or is about to be) obsolete or defunct. I was originally planning to include some of the "top 10 for 2009" stories, but enough is enough—and, especially at the end of a decade, there are too many

of the things to even think about. Note that the material here all comes from 2009; if there's enough interesting stuff in early 2010, including the LITA Top Tech Trends Midwinter session, I might do a followup.

First, let's look back at some of last year's trends, forecasts and predictions—as reviewed in PERSPECTIVE: TECH TRENDS, TRENDS AND FORECASTS in the February 2009 *Cites & Insights* (9:3). I'll intersperse current notes as needed, and I'm leaving out most of the discussion to leave space for this year's trends and forecasts.

Ghosts of Trends Past

Last year's roundup was divided into three sections: Tech trends, trends in general and forecasts. I began with my own take on tech trends, prepared for the OLA SuperConference in Toronto. I saw these trends as vital for thinking about libraries, technology and the like:

Inside This Issue

Limits: They exist. Your financial resources are limited; you *can't* keep borrowing against tomorrow indefinitely. Deny them as we might, limits—natural resources, time, attention—don't simply disappear...

Business models: They matter. When you're considering how various services for your own work and your library's work will work, think about business models. To what extent are you relying on free services that don't appear to have any source of revenue? What happens to your service if those services disappear? Do you have any rational basis to believe they'll continue to exist, grow and be developed without clear revenue sources? Your library *has* a business model, typically that of a community service: People pay in advance in order to fund a common good.

Trusting the cloud: Set aside the jargon—the cloud's just software and services on someone

else's servers. "Trusting the cloud" has three key aspects, one particularly important where library functions are concerned: Trusting that the services will remain (see "business models"); trusting that your data will be safe; and trusting that *confidentiality* will be preserved. I'm not arguing that you shouldn't use the cloud; I *am* arguing that you should think several times before relying entirely on the cloud.

Valuing existing users and services: Yes, you need to see how you can serve emerging needs of your community (*your community*)—but times of limits make your existing services more valuable than ever. Don't ignore your existing users in order to court a minority of people living the digital lifestyle; find a balance. And if you find that some of the digerati really *do* have all the money to satisfy their instant-everything demands and have no intention of using your services—well, in fact, *you can't please everybody*, and there's a limit to how hard you should try.

Real communities: What technologies and balances serve *your* users in *your* community? The answer's considerably different for a town in which 99% of residents are wealthy and have high-speed broadband and smart phones (if such a town exists) than it is for a city where many people aren't online at all (except at the library), many more have only dialup at home, and $100 a month for a smart phone data service is an outrageous expense...

Taking back the language: That's a group heading for a number of language-related issues. It means understanding that "Essentially free" means somebody somewhere is paying a *lot* of money. It means thinking to yourself "what you mean **we?**" when someone pronounces something that "we" or "we all" do or think... It means flagging "inevitable" as a typically nonsensical substitute for argument. It means honoring skepticism while trying to avoid cynicism.

I'll stick with those as vitally important underlying trends for librarians to consider. There's a lot of back-and-forth as to whether Americans are willing to accept limits, or whether we'll all start spending beyond our means once again. I hope it's the former, even if that slows the recovery, but I'm not making projections.

Steve Lawson posted "Social software deathwatch" at *See also...* as his own "top tech trend to watch." It's along the lines of my thoughts on business models and trusting the clouds. He cited a bunch of social-networking sites that disappeared in 2008; we've lost quite a few in 2009 as well.

It's great to put stuff on these sites to increase your media's visibility or to find a more convenient way to share documents or something. But what happens if your free hosted wiki site suddenly goes bankrupt or your document sharing site's servers are accidentally sold for scrap, or the video hosting site you use objects to the hot book-on-book action you have posted?...

Libraries and librarians and archivists who care about preserving the world's cultural output: where are we now? Do we have anything to add to an effort to help keep online culture from going down the drain? I fear that most libraries can barely deal with the digital content we are directly responsible for, leaving the wilds of the Internet to people like Jason Scott and Brewster Kahle to deal with, but I'd love to hear examples of libraries taking on this kind of responsibility...

[To] quote from [Jason Scott's] "Cloud" post:

> If you want to take advantage of the froth, like with YouTube or Google Video (oh wait! Google Video is [not accepting new content]) then do so, but recognize that these are not Services. These are not dependable enterprises. These are parties. And parties are fun and parties are cool and you meet neat people at parties but **parties are not a home**...

So that's my top tech trend for 2009. There's a reason it's called "cloud" computing. It looks beautiful now, but could be gone in a moment.

Might I suggest that this trend is just as important in 2010?

Library Trendsters

Eric Lease Morgan's trends:

> Indexing with Solr/Lucene works well. Linked data is a new name for the Semantic Web. Blogging is peaking. Word/tag clouds abound. "Next Generation" library catalogs seem to be defined. The Digital Dark Age continues—that is, digital preservation of internet resources stinks.

I added notes about several of these—e.g., do word clouds *mean* anything, is linked data actually happening? A year later, I still wonder whether word and tag clouds *mean* much of anything, whether linked data is showing broad applicability (and application) and whether blogging having peaked is meaningful.

Sarah Houghton-Jan's trends, with her own wording in bold:

> **The art of web presence maintenance**:... Managing a library's extended web presence truly has become an art, and an art that each library needs to (and seems to want to) learn about.

Overgeneralized, since there are *many* libraries that lack the resources to have extended web presences at all, but still an important (general) trend.

> **Plug-ins, widgets and hacks, oh my**! Websites are no longer stand-alone entities. They are segmented bits of code...all grouped together to make dynamic and interactive pages... The number of libraries taking advantage of these will continue to grow, especially in times of difficult budgets when "free" is the only choice.

Also overgeneralized, and for many websites standalone still makes sense—but the last sentence continues to be true. (Still: "free" continues to be a tricky choice to make.)

> **My kumpyootur kan has a kloud**:... When cloud computing becomes the norm (which I and others think it will in the next few years), this will be a boon for library users...

Apart from the cute title, this leaves out the whole issue of trusting the cloud for data security and confidentiality. I'm not among those who expect *full* cloud computing to become the norm.

> **Online training has its debutante ball**: To date, most libraries (and by libraries I mean library managers and supervisors) treat online learning like it isn't valid... [But] in the last year I have seen more libraries opening up to online training as a valid training delivery method...

Probably an ongoing trend.

> **Less $ = Less eResources** (a disturbing trend): It seems that eResources (databases and eBooks) budgets are being cut more than the traditional collection budgets are... Times are tough—which is precisely why eResources make more sense. They have a higher return on investment, examining cost vs. use, (up to 5 times as much in my studies)... Especially for periodicals, eResources make more sense than physical ones. And yet, this year, periodical budgets aren't being cut but periodical database budgets are...

As a patron, I get nervous when "eResources make more sense" is applied broadly for public libraries. Patron preference should definitely play a part here.

Karen Coombs' trends:

> **My personal A-HA trend**: Web applications that are extremely flexible, versatile and extendable... (Specific example: Drupal.)

> **The everyone's going to say it but it needs to be said trend**: Mobile technologies are changing society. They are here to stay, they are only going to get better with time, and we need to expect mobile devices to be a significant portion of our usage.

As soon as you say "significant portion" rather than "ubiquitous" or "all," I agree.

> **The one that scares the sh!t out of me**: The waking digital preservation nightmare. Whether it is books digitized by Google, videos posted on the web, or Flickr photos the explosion of digital content for which there isn't a clear curation plan has created a void which few libraries seem to be willing to step up and fill...

Still significant (maybe more so)—but is there any way to even begin to cope?

> **The trend I think may empower smaller libraries the most**: Hosted supported open source software. There are an increasing number of companies both in the library and non-library world providing hosting and support for open source software...

One such company has gone in a semi-proprietary direction, but that's another story.

Greg Landgraf's *AL Inside Scoop* report on the actual meeting includes open source as above, economic considerations, geolocation in library services—and linked data, with some questioning of real examples. Roy Tennant noted an LC site using linked data that was supposed to be up 4-6 weeks after Midwinter; that project appears to be "Authorities & Vocabularies" at id.loc.gov, which came up in May 2009.

Michael Stephens posted a massive 7,800-word "Ten trends & technologies for 2009" on January 12 at *Tame the web*. I'll refer you back to either that buzzword-filled essay or my February 2009 excerpts; I see little point in repeating them, and can't get beyond "tribes" and "ubiquity" and "digital lifestyle" to provide a coherent critique...not even of the notion that library schools should no longer prepare people for reference librarianship or children's services.

Wired's technology breakthroughs of 2008

The magazine claimed these breakthroughs "**will change your [world] in 2009**." That makes them forecasts of a sort. The list is in "last to first" order, presumably making the last one most important. My notes about *actual* "change your world" impact in 2009 are interspersed with the bold-faced breakthroughs.

- ➢ **Flexible displays**. Impact on "your world" in 2009: Nonexistent, I'd guess.
- ➢ **Edible chips** (silicon chips, that is, monitoring vitals etc.). Since they weren't in clin-

ical trials in early 2009, it's fair to say few of you have found them changing your world.

➢ **Speedo LZR.** Really, truly, *Wired* thought this was one of the *ten most important technology breakthroughs* in 2008. Outlawed for international competition starting in 2010, if I'm not mistaken. Your world? Probably unchanged.

➢ **Flash memory.** As I said last year, this isn't a breakthrough, it's a commodity—and while pricing keeps going down, nothing fundamental has changed.

➢ **GPS** (really geoservices). If you're a smartphone user, it's possible that geoservices really did "change your world" in 2009; I'll give *Wired* this one.

➢ **Memristor**: Only *Wired* could claim something it *admits* was at least five years away from production would "change your world" that same year.

➢ **Video-capable SLRs**: Yep, they're there, even hi-def. Have they changed your world?

➢ **USB 3.0**: Are you using this? Are you aware that it exists? Seen any *products*? Probably not—as of late 2008, the first products weren't expected until 2010.

➢ **Android**: I'll give *Wired* this one too—but it hasn't changed most people's worlds.

➢ **Apple's App Store**: *The* most important breakthrough. Maybe so, for those who have iPhones and ample funds.

If I'm feeling charitable, *Wired* scores four out of ten for the most technophilic readers (those who own both Android smartphones and iPhones, and who find that owning a video-capable SLR has changed their world).

Paula Hane: Trends to Watch in 2009

These are *some* of Hane's trends relevant to libraries, from a piece posted January 8, 2009 at *ITI NewsLink*—but unlike some other trends lists, these are trends Hane considers *worth watching* in 2009, not necessarily massive adoptions:

Growth in the mobile web (increasingly location-aware services)

Open source solutions looking increasingly attractive...

Web apps...gaining traction over expensive software solutions

Increasing traction for open access journals

Increasing use of social networking services for communication (rather than email)

More innovative web mashups

Further developments in semantic technologies and applications, increasing context of content

Increasing movement to enhanced library catalogs (reviews, ratings, tags, etc.)

Ongoing book digitization projects—some partnering with Google, others making it on their own

More options and improvements in ebook readers, increased adoption, and, hopefully, lower prices (Amazon Kindle, Sony Reader, iRex suite, Foxit eSlick, Bookeen Cybook, etc.)

Security and privacy remaining major concerns [a permanent trend].

At the time, I called it a solid list. I'll stand by that comment.

Reid Goldsborough's list

These items came from a JWT (ad agency) report and appeared in the January 2009 *LinkUp Digital*. I've left out most of my comments. New quick notes [in brackets].

Use of email will decline. [Not so's I've noticed, and the logic was of the "nobody goes to that club anymore because it's too popular" variety—we're shunning email because there's too much of it!]

Computing will increasingly become untethered. [Cloud computing, that is. To some extent, true.]

Use of mobile devices will continue to increase. ["Well, yes…" is what I said a year ago.]

Personal computers and TV will "continue to merge." [I said "not really" in 2009, and still do—streaming video on a TV does not constitute a merger with computing.]

Trendwatching's half dozen consumer trends for 2009

Trendwatching.com is *devoted* to cutesy neologisms but also, seemingly, to the ability of clever marketing to overcome any consumer resistance to ever-increasing expenditures. The half-dozen trends (*consumer* trends, note) for 2009 included "nichetributes" ("recession-proof" gimmicks for your "niche lifestyle" such as gloves with metal dots on the fingertips, the better to use your iStuff), "luxyoury" (finding ways to get you to spend more money by "defining luxury" differently), "feedback 3.0" (businesses responding directly within review sites), "econcierge" (getting people to pay to find out how to "go green") and "mapmania" ("one orgasmic celebration of map-based tracking, finding, knowing and connecting"—the site's words, not mine!). The sixth, the only trend

with a name that's not a neologism, basically said there will always be ways to *sell, sell, sell*, no matter that we were in a recession.

Ross Dawson's "Six important forces"

Dawson, at *Trends in the living networks*, is a self-identified Very Big Deal, "globally recognized as a leading keynote speaker and authority on business strategy." The six "forces":

Constant partial attention. People "consuming 20 hours or more of media a day." "To be successful, we *need* to thrive on constant interruption."

As absurd as media "consumption" has gotten, Dawson overstates the reality—and saying fragmented attention is "inevitable" continues to be silly.

Half of us expose ourselves; the other half watches. Dawson actually claimed "half of us" would be "sending video updates of our every move" in 2009, with the rest of us becoming voyeurs.

Wrong, wrong, wrong...thank heavens. I don't believe there are all that many folks videocasting their lives; I'm *certain* it's nowhere near 5%, much less "half of us." And how much time do you spend as a voyeur?

Gen Y wakes up to Gen Z. Dawson defines Gen Y as born 1979-1990 and calls it the "me generation" where "Gen Z" is "sophisticated and with a social conscience."

Last year I said "I think it's all gen-gen and increasingly divisive nonsense." I'll stick with that.

Outsourcing for the masses. We'll be using "assistants in India or Hungary to make travel bookings, set up a personal website, or design a flyer for the school fete." He does mean *we*—not companies but individuals in America and Australia.

Sure we are. Have you hired a Hungarian to design your personal website?

Companies become social. "In 2009, companies will truly embrace social networks, blogs, and other Web 2.0 tools..." Dawson believes that corporate Facebook profiles and blogs will lead to "a transformation of how we work."

If it wasn't for that "transformation" I'd let this go. Just a bit overstated in terms of transformational impact, I'm guessing—but then I'm semiretired.

Media industry shatters. Ah, but "journalists themselves will prosper."

Media didn't "shatter" in 2009, although there were some losses—and nobody has yet figured out how journalists "prosper" without salaried outlets.

Forecasts from Last Year

Just a few of them—noting that some trends above are specific enough to count as forecasts and were judged as such.

ReadWriteWeb

This blog included 56 forecasts. Some of the interesting ones and how they played out:

iTunes will add social networking features.

I have no idea. Did it?

Yahoo will get bought by some big media company, not Microsoft.

Wrong.

Microsoft will release a "cool online version of Office" and Google will release an "amazing new version" of Google Docs.

Wrong in 2009.

Twitter and Technorati won't get acquired but FriendFeed will (probably by Google).

Mostly right, but FriendFeed was acquired by Facebook.

Twitter will be acquired.

Wrong. (Yes, RWW's forecasts can be mutually contradictory—they come from several people.)

Lifestreams (sigh) will continue to evolve. (Alternatively, "lifestreaming" products—this person mentions FriendFeed—will remain niche products serving early adopters. I'm on FriendFeed: so much for *that* prediction!)

Too vague to be falsifiable.

Twitter will figure out a way to make money.

Wrong, as far as I know.

An iPhone will appear with video recording capabilities.

Wrong device: an iPod has video, not an iPhone.

"Google backlash begins, Apple backlash does not."

Maybe.

Yahoo gains goodwill (and Google loses it).

I don't see that Yahoo's gained a lot of goodwill.

Twitter will start to embed ads into user streams.

Did they?

"Pro Twitterer" will be a real job.

I don't believe this is true.

Microsoft buys Netflix and resurrects WebTV.

Wrong.

Facebook Connect will become the de facto universal logon—or Gmail will be, once Google makes Gmail logons OpenID-compatible.

Wrong.

eBay will be acquired by Amazon.

Wrong.

Ian Douglas

Douglas, head of digital production for *The Telegraph*, did have the sense to say no sensible commentator would go anywhere near predictions for 2009—but gave his anyway. Some of them, paraphrased:

> Computer sales will be down, but "the few computers sold will be higher quality items, intended to last a couple of years at least. Think Sony and Apple rather than Dell or Packard Bell."

HP and Dell both seem to be doing just fine.

> Microsoft will suffer as people skip the "ridiculously overpriced Office suite" and turn instead to free online word processors...and piracy of the software will increase.

Office ("ridiculously overpriced" at around $120 for three computers, for the home/student version) has 94% of the market.

> Sales of "larger but essentially useless items" will dwindle, while "small but life-affirming purchases" will rise. What's fascinating here: Douglas calls HD camcorders and netbooks "larger but essentially useless" items and iPhone apps, Wiis, iTune songs, DVDs and digital film downloads "small but life-affirming."

As I noted, the idea that a $160 camcorder or $250 netbook is "larger but essentially useless" while a $300 Wii is "small but life-affirming" is charming. Netbooks didn't exactly fall off the charts...

> "Blu-ray will die as HD downloads and super-fast broadband spread."

Remember, this is for 2009. Maybe the UK has super-fast broadband, but in the U.S. Blu-ray's starting to become commonplace.

> "Your mother will follow you on Twitter, so you'll have to find another community."

More Facebook than Twitter...and there's no place left to hide.

> Battery life will take over from processor speed as the big number on billboards.

CPU speed hasn't been a big number for years—and claimed battery life is being featured in ads.

> At least one of the big three American car companies will become bankrupt.

He got that one right. Twice.

> Electric cars will begin to replace hybrids as the environmentalists' choice.

As I said then: "In 2009? With the unlimited venture capital funds now available to make true electric cars factory items? Talk to Tesla about that particular short-term projection." Wildly offbase.

Freedom to Tinker's predictions for 2009

FTT *does* do scorecards, and I only mentioned nine of the 36 predictions from last year. The first, DRM technologies failing to prevent widespread infringement, is a standing and always-correct prediction. Some of the others (leaving out two where I don't know enough to comment at all):

> 3. As lawful downloading of music and movies continues to grow, consumer satisfaction with lossy formats will decline, and higher-priced options that offer higher fidelity will begin to predominate.

Unclear, but 256K MP3 (still lossy, but much better-sounding) has pretty much taken over from 128K AAC and MP3. (FTT marked this as wrong.)

> 24. Shortly after the start of the new administration, the TSA will quietly phase out the ban on flying with liquids or stop enforcing it in practice.

Didn't happen, although it seemed like a good projection. Instead, things are getting worse.

> 27. An embarrassing leak of personal data will emerge from one or more of the social networking firms (e.g., Facebook), leading Congress to consider legislation that probably won't solve the problem and will never actually reach the floor for a vote

Did the first happen? I'm sure there was never such a vote.

> 30. The Blu-ray format will increasingly be seen as a failure as customers rely more on online streaming.

"Be seen as" is the tricky phrase, and might be true, but Blu-ray's not failing.

> 33. A hot Christmas item will be a cheap set-top box that allows normal people to download, organize, and view video and audio podcasts in their own living rooms.

Podcasts? Not so much.

> 34. Internet Explorer's usage share will fall below 50 percent for the first time in a decade, spurred by continued growth of Firefox and Safari and deals with OEMs to pre-load Google Chrome.

Didn't happen.

Trends and Forecasts for 2010

The 2010 Horizon Report

I've never tracked this assured annual "time to adoption" series of education-related trends, but here's what's on the horizon for 2010:

- ➢ One year or less: Mobile computing, open content.
- ➢ Two to three years: Ebooks, simple augmented reality
- ➢ Four to five years: Gesture-based computing, visual data analysis.

That's from the preview at www.mmc.org/pdf/2010-Horizon-Report-Preview.pdf. The details include a *lot* of generalizations ("we" all find mobile computing indispensable, *the* role of teachers is shifting from guardian and dispenser to guide and coach); if you strip those out as typical of trendspotters, it's hard to argue that all of these won't play *some* roles in education.

The Gartner hype cycle as it applies to 2010-11

This one's a mid-year report on "emerging technologies 2009," and I love Gartner's five stages—with one enormous caveat. If you're not aware of the stages, they are Technology Trigger (launch or demo), Peak of Inflated Expectations (loads of hype), Trough of Disillusionment (when failures become evident), Slope of Enlightenment (when some businesses and users find the tool in the toy), and Plateau of Productivity (when the technology becomes useful and accepted).

The caveat? *Most technologies fail*—within that cycle, or shortly thereafter. My usual line is 96%: That is, 80% of new *developments* never make it to the marketplace—and, historically, 80% of new *products and services* fail within a few years. Multiply those and you get 96%. The truth may not be that awful, and "technologies" may not fail as often as products in general—but the landscape is littered with failed social networks, failed hot new technologies and other failures.

I picked up a comment on the Gartner report from a July 27, 2009 post by Hutch Carpenter at *I'm Not Actually a Geek* (bhc3.wordpress.com). The 51-page report itself sells for $1,995, so I certainly haven't read it in full. Carpenter's post reproduces the master "hype cycle" chart, showing an astonishing number of "emerging technologies" and both their claimed positions on the hype cycle and Gartner's estimate of "years to mainstream adoption." The chart ignores the Plateau of Productivity—presumably, things are already "mainstream" at that point.

For 2010, there's not much trendy here—because Gartner only flags two items as "less than two years" away from mainstream adoption: cor-porate blogging and web 2.0 (but "web 2.0" is still in the Trough of Disillusionment!). The set of technologies marked as being on the slope of enlightenment, but with longer targets for mainstream adoption, includes:

- ➢ Two to five years: SOA, location-aware applications, wikis, electronic paper and tablet PCs.
- ➢ Five to ten years: Speech recognition.

Is it really likely that wikis will reach mainstream adoption in 2-5 years if they haven't already? Are businesses suddenly going to fall in love with eccentric markup and mass editability?

As noted, there are a *lot* of other technologies on that chart. Carpenter comments on a few ("social software suites," which he sees as part of "Enterprise 2.0"—whatever *that* might be; "Idea management"; Microblogging (another "Enterprise 2.0" piece); Cloud computing; and E-book readers). All of these are flagged as two to five years from the mainstream, with all but "idea management" in the Peak of Inflated Expectations segment—indeed, if you add Internet TV and Wireless power, you've got the whole inflated-expectations group.

Where I think Gartner makes a good point (but I haven't read the report): Cloud computing and ebook readers *can* and probably *will* enter the mainstream, but are likely to fall far short of some of the hype *Wired* and others are throwing at them. Ebooks can become a multi-billion dollar business without "the death of print books" and cloud computing (which is doubtless *already* a multi-billion dollar business) can get much larger without "dethroning" personal computing and server-based applications. I have no idea what idea management is, so won't comment.

Top digital trends for 2010

That's the title for Nuri Djavit and Paul Newnes' December 3, 2009 post at *digital media buzz* (www.digitalmediabuzz.com). The trends in bold, followed by my paraphrase and comments:

- ➢ **Facebook replaces personal email**. The commentary here is a little bizarre, but apparently the lack of a tradename for emailing (similar to "Googling" or "Xeroxing") is a Bad Thing: "No brand ever became synonymous with email." So? Maybe you-all use private Facebook messages instead of email, but "Facebooking" as a general "displacement of personal email as a communication

tool" is, to my mind, a wild overstatement. Partial displacement? Sure, just as "micro-blogging" partially replaces blogging.

- **Open source software starts making money (thanks to the cloud)**. Somehow, we're now just seeing open-source projects "available to the masses"—but the example given is Beanstalk (a Subversion programming code repository, just the thing "the masses" have been looking for). This trend is all about commercializing free software. I dunno; I would have thought Firefox was a reasonably established example of open source software "available to the masses," and seems to me Red Hat and others have made money off Linux for years now.
- **Mobile commerce—The promise that has never delivered, yet**. But it's finally going to. Maybe.
- **Fewer registrations—one sign-in fits all**. With the qualifier "fewer," I think this is right on the money, but I'm guessing banks and financial institutions will *and should* be exceptions. I'm not sure I want my OpenID to grant credit card access in general, actually, but it's fine with me if it logs me into every blog commenting feature.
- **The continuing evolution of Web-driven, open source DIY culture**. You'd have to read this one yourself. If they mean "crowdsourcing," I'm doubtful. If they mean web-based collaboration among generally-small teams, they may be right.
- **Info-art**. Yes, there will be "greater innovation spurred by more elegant ways of capturing and visualizing information"—and it will continue to make me and some others nervous, because "data visualization" can do such a wonderful job of biasing and distorting data...particularly if you scrap a few outliers because they mess up the visualization.
- **Crowd sourcing**. Here it is directly, "a growing tool as part of outsourcing strategies." Huge growth in crowd-sourcing models. "Organizations will mobilize the passionate special interest groups to not only carry a message but, even more importantly perhaps, to lead and take part in activities on their behalf." I don't doubt that companies and others will do their best to

get people to do something for nothing; "digital sharecropping" seems unlikely to fade away.

- **More Flash, not less**. Sigh.

It's worth noting that these "digital trends" are *all about marketing and business*. "Social media" is only interesting as it's coupled into "social media marketing." The two writers are partners in a digital marketing and design company.

Technology trends of 2009: What does 2010 bring?

That's the title for a December 15, 2009 post at *Krafty Librarian*. Krafty references *another* post, Max Anderson's "Top digital trends for 2010 (and other tech news)" (posted December 10, 2009 at *The Cornflower*, nnlm.gov/gmr/blog).

Anderson quotes the same post and list you see above, cites the last point ("More Flash, not less") as one he needs to pay attention to (in part thanks to Flash's opportunities for abuse), and asks what others see as digital trends in their organizations.

Krafty breaks things down into "Hot in 2009," "Not in 2009," "Hot in 2010?" and "Not in 2010?" Some of the trends are medicine-specific and I'm omitting those, but the others are in some cases provocative:

- **Hot in 2009**: App phones (and two medicine-specific trends). "Say goodbye to 'smart phones' and hello app phones."
- **Not in 2009**: Blogs ("everybody is tweeting now") and medicine-specific items. "Everybody is tweeting now": Wow. So much for blogs...like *Krafty Librarian*.
- **Hot in 2010**?: Flash, Twitter and Mobile optimization with a followup universal statement, quoted verbatim: "**Everybody** is using app phones."
- **Not in 2010**?: Google Wave, E-readers in medical libraries.

If by "everybody" Krafty really means "everybody in the medical field," I don't know enough to cry bs, although I'm doubtful. In a more general sense, it's a good example of the dangers of generalization.

Trends for 2010

What's Next: Top Trends is "a blog about current and future trends," also subtitled "the diary of a futurist." It's by Richard Watson, a "futurist writer, speaker and consultant" based in Sydney and London, who is nothing if not self-assured. You can ex-

plore his observations at toptrends.nowandnext.com. The heart of this November 17, 2009 post is his list of "things that I'm starting to see or expect to emerge over the next 12-18 months":

> Globalization unraveling; Re-sourcing (industrial repatriation); Expecting less; Conspicuous non-consumption; Unsupervised adults (UK only); Constant partial stupidity; Digital isolation; Flight to the physical; Hunger for shared experiences; Fear fatigue.

Watson also provides his lists of trends for 2008 and before, with his assertions as to whether the trends are working out. You could have lots of fun arguing over his judgments—particularly given timing. (Was "simplicity" really trending upward in 2008?

I'd like to think *or hope* that Watson's right about several of these, but you'd need more details to make sense of some of them. In this case, I'll just say that the list is refreshingly free of the usual "high technology always succeeds, digital always conquers everything else" bias of most trends lists. Whether that makes it better or worse...not my call.

10 ways social media will change in 2010
ReadWriteWeb *loves* lists and particularly assured projections. This particular list appeared on December 11, 2009, posted by Ravit Lichtenberg. Some brief highlights—Lichtenberg's assertion in boldface, my notes following:

➤ **Social media will become a single, cohesive experience embedded in our activities and technologies**. Wow. For all of us, social media becomes *by December 2010* "an integrated, unquestionable component of your online and offline experiences." This will "cut across all of our activities" and "everything we do will be gathered and streamed together." Count me out, and this may be the single most dystopian vision I've seen for 2010: *One Great Social Network to Rule Us All.*

➤ **Social media innovation will no longer be limited by technology**. Since there will be no closed platforms or discrete logins, companies will "leverage existing assets" in new and wonderful ways. No comment.

➤ **Mobile will take center stage**. For all of us? Maybe not quite so fast.

➤ **Expect an intense battle as people and companies look to own their own content**. Which would seem to conflict with some of

the others, but never mind. Intense battle? I doubt it. (Rupert Murdoch is no more the universal constant than Steve Jobs is.)

➤ **Enterprises will shape the next generation of what we've called "social media."** Not just that social networking all takes place on corporate platforms, but that companies will *determine* how social experiences work. Oh, what a wonderful projection.

➤ **ROI will be measured—and it will matter.** It doesn't hurt to remember that RWW is really all about money.

➤ **Finally: Real, cool and very bizarre online-offline integration**. Among other things—and remember, these are *short-term* projections, "you'll never need to ask for a business card again" at events and we (all of us?) will be using our mobile devices to make our real-world decisions.

➤ **Many "old" skills will be needed again**. The skills all seem to be marketing-related. Why am I not surprised?

➤ **Women will rule social media.** Oddly, take away the silly "rule" and this is a useful comment: Companies who don't pay attention to women are in trouble—but that's nothing new.

➤ **Social media will move into new domains**. What domains? "Verticals such as nonprofit" (wow! the whole nonprofit sector is now just a "vertical" like job training and health care). This long essay repeats the assurance that social media will be "fully integrated into *everything* we do online and offline" (emphasis added--does that include the kitchen, the bedroom and the bathroom?) and seems to say companies will give up boring old philanthropy for wonderful new "learning or teaching."

Since all of this is apparently inevitable, there's little point in saying "not so much."

10 tech concepts you need to know for 2010
On one hand, this is an interesting divergence—from the *Wired* for things that actually exist, that is, *Popular Mechanics*. It's from the January 2010 issue and available on the magazine's website (www.popularmechanics.com). On the other, given that this is things we *need to know* this year, well...here's the list and my notes with snarky opinions [in brackets].

➢ **Anthropomimetic machines**. Robots that mimic human form. There's a European prototype. [And we "need to know" this *in 2010*?]

➢ **Direct carbon fuel cells.** A California company *hopes* to have a 10kW prototype, using biomass, running in 2010. Another company "hopes soon to use the tech to power a small light bulb." [Could eventually be interesting—but *we need to know this in 2010?*]

➢ **Metabolomics**. You know DNA tests and how well DNA-specific medicine has worked out so far? Well, this one uses "8000 naturally occurring metaboloites," small molecules involved in bodily chemical reactions, and *another* test for a "metabolomic profile"—so here's another sure-fire set of "quick and easy tests for personalized health and medical guidance."

➢ **DNA Origami**. A suggestion that Caltech and IBM can "strategically position" folded DNA strands as anchor points for tiny computer-chip components. [Yep, this is *really* going to matter in 2010.]

➢ **Piezoelectric display.** Nothing new about piezoelectrics, but "screens that can change shape or texture"—mobile devices that "can harden protectively when turned off, and soften into a depressible touchscreen when turned on"—would be new. [Significant in 2010? We'll see.]

➢ **Osseointegration.** Prosthetics that fuse with living bone. It's been done on a German Shepherd. Six more operations *on dogs* are planned for 2010. [Implications as approved procedures for humans *in 2010*?]

➢ **Horizontal drilling.** Tapping "trillions of cubic feet of natural gas" in the U.S. by drilling to shale beds and turning the drills 90 degrees. [This one seems to depend on high prices for natural gas, and that could be a problem.]

➢ **Kinetic hydropower**. That is, underwater turbines gaining power from natural flow. [A great idea for years, unfortunately flawed by some failures in prototypes. Let's hope 2010 will see serious full-scale operation.]

➢ **Nanoyarn**. Carbon nanotubes woven into yarn for commercial applications. [Seems plausible—but the applications are fairly specialized.]

➢ **Ultracapacitors**. Possible alternatives to batteries for electric cars. One company claims they'll have an ultracapacitor-powered car in 2010...but that company's stopping production. [Ideally, yes; realistically—well, we'll see.]

This is an interesting list of future technologies—but for the average citizen, even a well-informed one, there are at most one or two that we "need to know" about in 2010, and that may be a high estimate.

It may be interesting to look back at the list of concepts we *needed to know* in 2009: T-rays (terahertz radiation, which is why airport security works *perfectly* now), hydrogel tissue engineering, picotechnology (like nanotechnology, but smaller), high-altitude long-endurance UAVs (unmanned planes), "secure super grids" (superconductor power transmission grids), autostereoscopy ("3D without the glasses"), collaborative search (surely *you* use Microsoft's SearchTogether for all your searching?), low rolling resistance tires, energy scavenging (reclaiming some heat as electricity) and compressed-air energy storage. How many of those rocked your world in 2009?

You can keep going back. Here's the 2008 list—*things you needed to know about in 2008*: EEG game controllers, self-healing materials (for car paint and fuselages, for example—oh, and bridges!), high-k transistors (hafnium-based chips with lower leakage), the real-world web (specifically, the triumph of Android in 2008), clear-pixel cameras (more sensitive in lower light), pay-per-glance ads ("billboards that watch you watch them"), flexible displays (wasn't it *great* that we all got flexible displays in 2008?), embedded voice recognition, self-defending bots (the *bad* kind of bots, zombie networks) and nano cancer therapy. Some of those actually did matter—in 2009, not 2008—and some are *still* ahead of real-world implications.

Given all that, it may make sense to include *Popular Mechanics'* far more realistic list of seven "top technology trends that *ruled* 2009" (emphasis added): Netbooks, phones that navigate, 3D cinema, inductive power, slimmed-down operating systems, app stores and "Android in everything." "Ruled" is an exaggeration, but at least these are all real-world trends. (I know, I know: This belongs in "Trends past," but I'm not sure it deserves a full writeup there.)

Ten predictions for the e-reader/e-book market in 2010

This set of predictions—these are forecasts, not trends—comes from *paidContent* (paidcontent.org) on December 1, 2009, courtesy of Sarah Rotman Epps and James McQuivey, both of Forrester Research. Here's the list, with their boldface forecasts and my commentary.

➢ **E Ink will lose its claim to near-100% market share for e-reader displays.** They expect to see cheaper electrophoretic displays but also dual-screen devices (e.g., the Nook) and OLED or transflective LCD. This seems like a slam-dunk projection: Almost certainly true.

➢ **Dual-screen mobile phones and net-books will eat into e-reader demand**. "Most consumers don't read enough to justify buying a single-function reading device, and according to Forrester's data, more consumers already read e-books on mobile phones and PCs than on e-readers." Also seems likely, although it's possible that such devices will expand the market rather than "eating into" demand.

➢ **Apps will make non-reading devices more e-book friendly**. Another slam-dunk. Did I mention that Forrester tends to be conservative and realistic within the realm of forecasting agencies?

➢ **eReaders will get apps, too**. Maybe—which will continue to raise issues as to just what an ebook reader really is.

➢ **Amazon will launch a suite of new touchscreen e-readers**. The writers expect to see touchscreens, color (with great battery life? really?) and flexible displays. I don't know enough to comment.

➢ **B&N will steal market share from Amazon and Sony**. "Steal" is the wrong word here, but wouldn't it be nice to have *serious* competition in this marketplace?

➢ **E-book content sales will top $500 million in the U.S**. Now, don't anybody get all excited here, but this strikes me as an entirely plausible forecast. Not certain, but plausible.

➢ **E-textbooks will become more accessible, but sales will be modest**. And, unfortunately, the analysts say *why* there won't be great sales. Since I've long touted e-

textbooks as a big market for the right ereaders, this is sad but probably true.

➢ **Magazine and newspaper publishers will launch their own apps and devices**. That one is 100% certain, I would say.

➢ **China, India, Brazil, and the EU will propel global growth, but the U.S. will still be the biggest market.** Outside my expertise, but sounds likely.

Notice all the "ain't gonna happen!" snark here? Missed it? Go back and read again... That's right: I believe this one's mostly likely to be right.

These predictions throw caution to the wind

In this case, I'm mostly going to point you to the post itself, way back on August 3, 2009, by Steven Bell on *ACRLog*. It's not terribly long and, *if you understand what he's doing*, it's amusing. He's riffing off "25 predictions for the university of the future" on—well, it's on one of those online-degree sites, and I'm not going to give it any more publicity than that.

Bell's assuming that "predictions for the university of the future" involves *the future*—let's say at least five or ten years out. Given that, consider some of the wild-eyed predictions: "There will be more of an emphasis on distance learning," "Technology innovation will be a priority," "Libraries will continue to become more tech-focused," "Universities will have a more global perspective," "Academic librarians will communicate with their users via mobile devices," "Academic libraries will become social centers on campus," "Academic librarians will be more involved in teaching," and "Students will increasingly start their research using Google and Wikipedia."

I double-checked. That foresighted look into the university of the distant future appeared on July 29, 2009. I mean, this is *hot stuff!* Just think—in another 10-20 years, some of those crazy ideas could come true. (Need I mention that some comments on Bell's post seem to take him seriously?) Here's the final paragraph:

> I hope my daring predictions left you stunned and amazed. It sure was a challenge to step out on a limb and do some truly visionary thinking about the future of academic librarianship. For those of you who will soon be planning your spring 2010 programs, I'm available for presentations about the future of academic librarianship. You never know what I'll be predicting next.

Heck, Steven, I can guess: In the future, some advanced libraries might buy access to journals, in electronic form, *in bulk!* Nah...never happen.

Why 2010 will be the year of the tablet

I wouldn't include this—another of *Wired*'s love songs to digital technology—except for the followup article. The piece appeared August 3, 2009; it's by Brian X. Chen. Oddly, the story's nowhere near as definite as the headline, as "will" becomes "may" in the first paragraph. That is, "2010 *may* finally be the year that the tablet PC evolves from being a niche device to becoming a mainstream portable computer." Why? Not, oddly enough, because of Apple—but because, according to Wired's insider sources, "mainstream heavyweights Dell and Intel are collaborating on a touchscreen tablet due for release next year." It's apparent that it will serve as "a subscription-based e-reader for displaying newspapers, magazines and other media." Which wouldn't make it a mainstream computer at all, but never mind.

Chen claims the device itself will be *free* (with a suitable contract), and the source says the companies were aiming for six months (putting it at February 2010). Naturally, there's a market "research" report claiming that the touchscreen market will triple in "the next few years" from $3.6 billion to $9 billion. (If you look at the *actual* forecast, that's *nearly* triple and it's in *seven years*—that is, 2015.) So what will this free device be, other than a Kindle-killer? Supposedly a 5" screen (*that should be great for magazines and especially newspapers!*), running Android or a mobile version of Windows 7.

Ah, but that was the post. On its own, it's just another case of *Wired* swooning over something they *think* might emerge, postulating all sorts of glorious futures, and generally being, well, *Wired.* Some bloggers pointed out some reasons 2010 might not be "the year of the tablet" and why the tablet, as a form factor, is unlikely to become ubiquitous (too big for a pocket, too small for full-size computing...)

Brian X. Chen was having *none of that*. One day later, he wrote what may be the classic *Wired* post on August 3, 2009: "Dear tablet naysayers: stop looking back when we're thinking ahead."

> Why, why, why, may I respectfully ask, are you all focusing on the past when we're discussing the future? Our article rests on the premise that 1.) New

technologies are improving touchscreen functionality, as depicted by the iPhone; 2.) New software including touchscreen support (e.g., Windows 7) is in the works, presumably delivering more tablet-friendly user interfaces than in the past; 3.) Several manufacturers, including Dell, Intel, HTC and Nokia are concentrating on efforts to construct new tablets with these new technologies, according to our sources.

The article does very little of that—and none of those premises (which should be plural, but *Wired* blogs probably don't have copy-editors) changes most of the objections to tablets. Somehow, the followup story turns into a discussion of the supposed Apple tablet (which gets all of one sentence in the original article, although it's a sentence that universalizes: "**Nearly everyone** has now confidently reported that Apple is launching a tablet by early next year").

The followup post is classic: *This Time It's Different*—but with a twist, namely calling out anybody who expresses skepticism. Apparently, it's *inappropriate* to approach proposed ideas with anything but naïve enthusiasm. The post ends: "We're excited to see what happens, aren't you?" Maybe others are willing to stir in some reality along with their enthusiasm, but that's not the Wired Way.

I'm not saying tablets won't be more successful in 2010 (they could hardly be *less* successful!). I have no idea whether Apple or Dell will produce tablets that are so wondrous that "everybody" (e.g., as many people as buy iPhones—you know, everyone *who matters*) will convert to them. I am saying that beating up on your critics is unusual and sad behavior for a print publication, even on its blog side.

Deathspotting

Last year saw the end of my "disContent" column in *EContent Magazine*, a column that began in 2001. The column offered a skeptical outsider's view of some things within the econtent industry. I'm proud of the column.

The title of the final column (which I haven't seen in print as of this writing) is "Is Dead Isn't Dead—But Maybe It Should Be." I take issue with all the "X is dead" or "X is dying" proclamations as lacking nuance and generally being foolish. I'd love to repeat the column here, but can't do so until April at the earliest. (Three months really isn't an unreasonable exclusivity clause!)

Meanwhile, deathspotting continues at an unhealthy pace, particularly when coupled with listmaking. (Yes, I did a column on listmaking as well—the only disContent column that's a set of numbered paragraphs.) Herewith, a few of many sets of things that are dead, are being killed, are or will be obsolete and the like—and a couple of commentaries by people who aren't wild about all this "death of" stuff. I do believe there's a distinction between lists that dance on the graves of undead media and technologies—and lists, such as one I almost included but finally left out, that seem to be more nostalgia than anything else, even if they tend to go too far in writing off older technologies.

obsolete tech? maybe not

I'm starting with Elaine Nelson's December 29, 2009 post at *emergency weblog* (www.elainenelson. org)—the most recent of these items—because I'm taken with what she says at the end of the post. She points to Mike Elgan's set of "10 obsolete technologies to kill in 2010," which I discuss later in this section, and argues with several of them. It's a good post in its own right, and not that long, so I'll just quote the last three paragraphs:

> In general, his list of "obsolete" basically means, "can be replaced with the newest high-end stuff." It doesn't much take into account families, people with tight budgets, people outside of major metropolitan areas or people who don't like cell phones. And it puts a surprising amount of trust in the "cloud" one way or another, which doesn't seem entirely warranted.
>
> So: obsolete? Not so much, at least not in the world I'm living in.
>
> I probably didn't need to respond to such a thin troll of an article, but it was getting on my nerves. There, now I can let it go

How many gurus and tech writers consider anything that "can be replaced with the newest high-end stuff," with budget not an issue, as being obsolete? More than a few, I think—and that observation may be useful as you consider some of the items that follow.

Where is everyone?

Maybe it's unfair to poke at the English-language posts of a Danish guru like Thomas Baekdal, but when you get something like this April 27, 2009 piece from *baekdel.com* it's hard not to. Baekdal says "we are currently in the middle of the most drastic change since the invention of the newspaper":

> We are seeing an entirely new way for people to interact. One that makes all traditional ways seem silly. It is a fundamental shift, and it will completely change the world as we know it. And the best thing about it is that you get to help make it happen.

There's a dramatic timeline on "influence over time"—one that seems to show that local marketplaces ceased to matter around 1998 and that "newspapers/magazines" (apparently there's no distinction) will entirely cease to matter around 2020 and TV not much later; basically, after that, it's all "social" all the time.

There's a lot of detail here, and it might be more interesting if Baekdal wasn't so intent on killing things off. (There's also some loopy history here, but never mind.) Baekdal has TV basically killing off radio and making newspapers irrelevant by 1998. Come 2007, there's no doubt. He says, in so many words, "Just as TV *had eliminated radio* (because it was better and richer way to give people LIVE information) so are social networks eliminating blogs." (Emphasis added.) So radio's been eliminated—who knew? And blogs are on the way out—because they can't "keep up" with social networks.

We get the subhead for 2009, one admitting no doubt at all: "2009—Everything is Social." Newspapers are "dead in the water." "People are watching less TV than ever" (*absolutely not true* based on all media studies, but never let the facts get in the way of history!) Instead, "everyone" is using social networking tools to connect. Ah, but here's The Future: "social news"—direct from the source, without synthesis, analysis or coherence. Here's the key deathwatch summary:

> In the next 5-10 years, the world of information will change quite a bit. **All** the traditional forms of information are essentially dead. The traditional printed newspapers **no longer exists**, television in the form of preset channels is replaced by single shows that you can watch whenever you like. Radio shows is replaced podcasts and vodcasts.

Emphasis added. (Syntax not corrected.) Books seem to be too obsolete to even be worth mentioning. "The information stream will be a natural part of every second of your life." Apparently totally customized, so you *never need to hear anything that doesn't please you*. "Instead of reading 5 different articles on the same topic, you will be presented with one, highlighting the vital point of interest"—but since there are no journalists (he

sees editors despite his "direct from the source" claim, but with no signs of who would *pay* for editing), who would *establish* a vital point of interest?

The first comment offers a thoughtful real-world alternative, but Baekdal's having none of it: "There will always be laggards who refuse to change, and cling on to the old ways. But, as a strategy, those are not the people or the markets you should focus on." It's *all about marketing*, after all. He touts *another* article on "why the traditional media will **all** be replaced." It's also clear that "information" is the only thing that matters to Baekdal. (He starts out from an odd position—he reads the bell-shaped curve of adoption to say that, once the late majority and laggards start signing on, *it's all over*—once laggards do something, *everyone who matters* has already stopped.)

There are a *lot* of comments, including cheers and insightful ripostes, such as one noting "You assume that everyone is just like you." But isn't that true of almost every hotshot futurist guru? (In one of his many comment replies, he explains that he left books out entirely because "they are not ways to communication, but rather ways to inform," and it's only *communication* that matters, despite his apparent focus on information.) Oh, and when someone asks how you'd *verify* that the "news" you get directly from the source—the only way we'll get information in this future—is true, Baekdal basically says "well, you *ask* them." It becomes clear that, while Baekdal claims this is all based on loads of interviews and other background, *it's just his notions*—he won't name sources or verifiable facts. Since he has TV as starting in 1900 and already significant in 1920 (*amazing*, given that the first broadcast electronic TV in the U.S. was in 1936, and the first licensed commercial TV stations emerged at the end of World War II), one can only wonder.

100 things your kids may never know about
That's the title for a Nathan Barry piece at *Wired*'s "GeekDad" on July 22, 2009. It's a long list, but it refers to "**your** kids"—not "some future generation not born yet"—so it's reasonable to assume these are things *nobody* would encounter after, say, 2005.

Barry had me at #1: "Inserting a VHS tape into a VCR to watch a movie or to record something." Really? that's *gone* already? But we did it last Wednesday. There are better ones:

9. Vinyl records. Even today's DJs are going laptop or CD.

13. Scanning the radio dial and hearing static between stations.

14. Shortwave radio.

16. Watching TV when the networks say you should.

18. Wires. "OK, so they're not gone yet, but it won't be long."

35. Recording a song in a studio.

37. Finding out information from an encyclopedia.

39. Doing bank business only when the bank is open.

41. Phone books and Yellow Pages.

42. Newspapers and magazines made from dead trees.

45. Not knowing exactly what all of your friends are doing and thinking at every moment.

50. Privacy.

58. Putting film in your camera.

71. Remembering someone's phone number.

93. Looking out the window during a long drive.

95. Cash.

96. Libraries as a place to get books rather than a place to use the internet.

There are more—but the concept that *all* of these are so dead that "your kids"—ones alive today—"may never know about them" is, well, it's *Wired*. 18, 42 and 96 are particularly silly, I think, but so are many of the others—except, of course, for writers who assume that everybody else is exactly like them.

Incidentally, sales of vinyl LPs—while still less than 1% of all recorded music sales—more than doubled between 2007 and 2009, and are now in the multiple millions of albums each year. I'm not a vinyl lover (no turntable), but facts are facts.

Six soon to be obsolete technologies
I like Eric Schnell and most of what he writes, but I'll grouse a bit at his short deathlist in this July 22, 2009 post (apparently July 22 was a great day for pontificating about obsolete technologies!). The introduction uses a different form: "technologies that are fading, some fast." If "fading" means "being used less" and is roughly equivalent to *obsolescent*, then I'd be more inclined to agree in most cases—but there's a huge gap between obsolescent and obsolete, sometimes decades. Anyway, here are the six:

➢ **Photographic film**: Absolutely obsolescent—but every grocery store and drugstore still has loads of film-based single-use cam-

eras and 35mm film, so it's some years from being obsolete. (As an artistic medium, I'd guess film might stick around for a *long* time. As an everyday tool, not so much.)

➤ **Stamp vending machines**: If the USPS is removing them, then they're going away. Agreed—although it's a stretch to call these a technology. (And "having to go" to a grocery store or drugstore doesn't seem so painful when the PO is closed, since there must be 10-20 times as many such outlets as there are post offices.)

➤ **The Music CD**: "The current CD format will **go away** fairly soon as the shift from physical media to downloadable content continues." (Emphasis added, since it's the "go away" entirely that I think unlikely for quite a few years more.)

➤ **LCD displays**: (Because OLED is more efficient.) Eventually, yes, and probably unmourned—but it's taking a while for OLED to emerge.

➤ **Wrist watches**: Here's another "everyone else is like me," with all those other electronic devices with clocks. "Watches are more about fashion and less about function these days."

➤ **Antivirus software**: Schnell seems to believe we will *and can* rely on "cloud computer" approaches to cope with malware.

After I objected to the antivirus point in a comment, Schnell admitted to "thinking provincially" for institutions like OSU. Indeed, if the only way your computer can get to the internet is through a tightly-controlled institutional network, controlling malware at the network level makes sense. Until the first time you take a netbook to the local coffee shop, then attach it to your work computer...

Things that are being killed off by digitalisation
This one's also from *What's next: Top trends* (discussed earlier), posted November 27, 2009—and it's just two unannotated lists. The first one is 21 things that *are* being killed off, and it's full of nonsense. Which, unfortunately, means I also have to be a little doubtful about the second list, seven things that are *not* being killed off, and that's a shame.

Some sillier items among the first 21—noting that these aren't "things that may matter less" but "things that are **being killed off**":

Memory; Privacy; Experts; Concentration; Punctuality; Cheap watches; Spelling; Copyright; Reflection; Paper money; Landline telephones; Intimacy.

That's 12 out of 21 where I'd argue "killed off" is a grotesque overstatement, and I think you could make a good case against the demise of printing photographs (really? you never print digital photos?), plagiarism, telephone directories (as long as yellow pages are profitable) and even "listening to a whole album."

The seven things that this writer says are *not* being killed off by digitalization:

Public libraries; Vinyl record shops; Newspapers (look at the data globally); Physical banks; Meetings; Paper; Church.

I'd certainly like to believe he's right on all of those (although, you know, if people are buying LPs at vinyl shops, chances are they're still listening to whole albums)—but it's hard to wholeheartedly endorse one list when you've trashed two-thirds of another list.

10 obsolete technologies to kill in 2010
Mike Elgan of *Computerworld* isn't satisfied with deathwatches—he's out to *kill* these technologies. Why? Because they're "dumb" and because "better alternatives abound that are easier, cheaper, higher quality and much more efficient." Particularly, y'know, if you're *just like Mike Elgan,* have unlimited resources and feel that adding to landfills with slightly obsolescent products is a *great* thing.

I won't argue about fax machines, "lighter" outlets in cars (Honda doesn't call them that anyway) or redundant registration on websites. Yes, "www." at the start of a URL is mostly silly, but *it's not a technology*. Then we get to #4: "Business cards." Elgan's explanation is remarkable—particularly the third paragraph, which seems to assume you always *know* in advance that you're going to meet someone you might want to talk to later. So much for conferences and exhibits!

#5: Movie rental stores: This might be OK were it not for the explanation—namely, since movies are just digital files, you should be downloading them. Since, of course, *everybody has broadband with unlimited usage*. Right, Mike?

#6: Home entertainment remotes—because *you should be using your smart phone as a remote*. Which, of course, *we all have*.

#7: Landline phones. Elgan basically yells at the 75% of Americans who still have landlines, calling landline phones "redundant" (we *all* have cellphones), "annoying and waste time" and "have no way to take messages, or they have some obsolete answering machines." What can you say? (What's that? I can't understand what you're saying. You're probably using a cell phone...) Those obsolete answering machines have mostly been chips within landline cordless phones for years now, but never mind.

#8: Music CDs—because, you know, "we should (all) move to an all-digital, file-based library." Oh, and CDs have no significant advantages over downloadable media "such as MP3 files."

#9: Satellite radio—because, cue it up, *you should get it over the internet and via your smartphone*.

I think Elaine Nelson's commentary earlier sums it up pretty well. I'll give Elgan this: Instead of assuming everybody else *is* just like he is, he tells us that we *should* all have the same preferences. Arrogant and annoying, but at least different.

Can we please stop the killing?

The title's from Stephen Abram's December 14, 2009 post at *Stephen's Lighthouse*, which begins with a section of Asi Sharabi's December 8, 2009 post at *No Man's Blog* (no-mans-blog.com/). (Note: Abram gives the name of the blog as "No Man's Land"—and neither of the links in the post works, both leading to 404 SirsiDynix page. Could this be related to Abram's move from SirsiDynix to Ebsco?).

Here's part of the original post, omitting a few of the killing fields:

Please can we stop killing things?

Over the last few years we've been all guilty of new-technologies sensationalism. Our response to the overwhelming pace of change made us believe that emerging platforms and technologies will categorically and dramatically kill everything that was before them. Search for "TV is Dead" on google and you'll get over 2million(!) results. But is it? really?...

What else have we had?

Twitter is killing blogging!...

Second Life is killing Real Life!

Yahoo pipes will kill the browser!

Google is killing Microsoft!

iGoogle is killing Newspapers!...

Books are a thing of the past!

Google Wave will kill Facebook!

Facebook is killing email!

Twitter is killing Facebook!

And now, the most recent hyperbole, straight from Twitter's (AKA The Pulse) oven, I give you....

Streams are killing the web page.

Guess what. it turns out that when human evolve and construct culture(s) they have some time-attention-alchemist-like qualities whereby old things are not being replaced with new stuff, they add to them. Sometimes they compete and sometime co-habit and complementary and together they evolve and we evolve....

True, there are some casualties (DVD did kill the VHS) and natural selection (e.g. closure of few magazines and channels), some people make less money, some people make loads new money. Things do expand and contract, evolve and change but reality is more complex and is no where near the new-technologies massacres we read about every day.

So for 2010, let's try to avoid the trend of killing old things in favour of new things and live happily ever after...

"Closures of [a] few magazines" is an interesting one—because, in practice, scores of magazines die every year (that's been true for decades). And scores of new ones are born. Sometimes the new outnumber the failing; sometimes not.

Abram admits to having "participated in my share of dead technology panels but I guess I'm sick of it now." More of his added notes:

Let's all try to reach the stage of sophistication that we should be at. Dead or thriving polarizations are just too simplistic—just too black and white....

Today I listened to my radio and some CDs and watched broadcast TV. I shopped in a brick and mortar bookstore. I didn't have to visit a graveyard to do so. OMG, today, I even read a print newspaper—two of 'em—and two yesterday too! And I really don't think I am a dino.

So I agree with the plea. Let's manage these technological evolutions like the professionals we are and not be so shallow. Let's be more Darwinian.

I don't think I need to add much in the way of comment.

Perspective
Music, Silence & Metrics

This story—part essay, part casual research—begins with the editorial opening the November 2009 *Stereophile*. No, it's not a migration of my MY

BACK PAGES grumbling about high-end audio prices (or reviewers who mistake musicality for accuracy) to the main body of *Cites & Insights*—indeed, it's an example of why I still subscribe to *Stereophile*. And there is, believe it or not, a library connection—or at least there should be.

> *First of several digressions*: Core portions of this essay involve a website and movement of sorts called "pleasurizemusic." I should stress that "pleasurize" is an unfortunate, somewhat Germanic neologism based on "pleasure" and has *nothing* to do with Nicolai Ivanovich Lobachevsky (Николай Иванович Лобачёвский), or Tom Lehrer, or plagiarism. Well, maybe that's not entirely true—there is a slight Lehrer connection and I don't know enough about Lobachevskian geometry (or hyperbolic geometry) to be *certain* there's no connection at all.

Background: Spaces between the Notes

John Atkinson's November 2009 editorial (or "As We See It" column) is entitled "The Spaces between the Notes." It begins when the magazine's music editor handed Atkinson a Delbert McClinton CD and noted that it was *musically* good enough to be the issue's "Recording of the month" but the sound was "a bit funky." When Atkinson listened to it, he found it so in-your-face and fatiguing that he couldn't listen all the way through.

> I opened the first track with music-editing program Bias Peak Pro 6. As I suspected, the waveform was continually banging its head against the CD's maximum level—zooming in on vocal sections revealed the squared-off shape of a signal whose peaks have been chopped off, either by being clipped or by being hard-limited.

Unfortunately, says Atkinson, this wasn't unique.

> Heavy-handed compression and even plain old distortion have become ubiquitous in what have become termed "The Loudness Wars," in which songs are dynamically squashed to the point where they sound uniformly and fatiguingly loud throughout, even when played quietly. As I've written many times in the past decade, when all the dynamic contrast is removed, the music is damaged. The notes—the sounds played by the musicians—are *not* the music, but merely the framework for the music. As Miles Davis said, the music exists in the spaces *between* the notes. If that is the case, it hardly seems appropriate for recording and mastering engineers to fill up those

spaces, even if, in their defense, they're forced to do so by record-company suits' incessant demands to "Make it LOUDER."

Atkinson points to Turn Me Up! (www.turnmeup.**org**—if you use .com, you wind up at a link parking site), a nonprofit organization "campaigning to give artists back the choice to release more dynamic records." Quoting from the site:

> Today, artists generally feel they have to master their records to be as loud as everybody else's. This certainly works for many artists. However, there are many other artists who feel their *music would be better served by a more dynamic record*, but who don't feel like that option is available to them.

The organization is trying to establish objective measurements for dynamic recordings and has a "Turn Me Up! Certified" label that could go on CDs or related marketing materials. The label includes this wording:

> To preserve the excitement, emotion and dynamics of the original performances this record is intentionally quieter than some. For full enjoyment simply Turn Me Up! (www.TurnMeUp.org)

(The two-minute video clip on the organization's home page, using a Paul McCartney clip, is *extremely* convincing, at least in my opinion: It shows dramatically how extreme dynamic compression—making everything loud—robs music of intensity and life.)

We'll get back to Turn Me Up!—but first, back to the editorial that inspired this PERSPECTIVE. Atkinson mentions "another resource available to those who care about sound quality"—the TT Dynamic Range Meter at www.pleasurizemusic.com, "a foundation that aims to be able to label recordings with a whole-number dynamic value, giving consumers an immediate means of knowing if a record has been over-compressed or not." Quoting Pleasurizemusic's Friedemann Tischmeyer:

> Music—as an artistic means of expression—should transmit emotions. Nowadays, this is possible only to a limited degree because dynamics—a fundamental part of expressivity—are often missing... Modern mainstream music sounds like a flatly pressed board being rammed through loudspeakers and uses the greatest possible amount of intrusiveness just as advertising does—as a means of constantly trying to get the listener's attention. In this way, a fundamental aspect of music is lost.

The TT Dynamic Range Meter (henceforth TTDR) is available as a plugin for Bias Peak Pro 6, so Atkin-

son added it and analyzed a recent CD that *he* engineered (of Attention Screen, a small jazz combo). "I had had to squash the occasional peaks of the original 24-bit files a little in the mastering to better fit the music within the CD's 16-bit window. Nevertheless, the meter indicated that the dynamic range was still 10-14dB, which is much wider than a typical electric rock recording." What about the first and apparently nastiest song on that McClinton CD? *6dB*—actually, 5dB in one channel, 6dB in the other. Which is *awfully* low, if the measured dynamic range means anything at all.

Those are the only test results in the editorial. Atkinson discusses the remastered Beatles CDs and claims by the project coordinator that they were *not* dynamically compressed "to better match what has, sadly, become the modern norm." Early reviews suggest that the new CDs are more musical—sound more like live music—and there's *good* reason to believe dynamic range would be part of this.

File formats aren't the issue. No, CDs aren't "perfect sound forever" and are probably inferior to higher-resolution recordings in some cases, if your hearing and attention are good enough—but CDs do not *at all* require the kind of dynamic compression being discussed here. (CDs can handle a 96dB dynamic range.) Neither, for that matter, do MP3s. Lossy compression and dynamic compression are two entirely different things. Even 128K MP3 (which even to my aging ears is deficient and tiring) can handle wide dynamic range, and today's typical 256K MP3s are good enough for reasonably musical sound including full dynamic range.

> *Second digression—or maybe it's not.* The editorial includes two of the reasons I continue to regard *Stereophile* as a worthwhile resource, even if I treat many of the columnists and reviews as primarily sources of humor. To wit, the magazine makes a real effort to cover new developments related to musical recording—and John Atkinson, specifically, *does* use actual measurements as part of the magazine's toolkits, even though (perhaps appropriately) the measurements don't drive the review outcomes. (In almost all cases, the review's written before the measurements and the resulting sidebar are even prepared.) I don't think I would have heard about TTDR were it not for *Stereophile*.

Is There Really A Problem?

Yes, I think there is. Admittedly, I don't listen to a lot of contemporary music, particularly not con-

temporary rock, so I may not be personally affected by the problem—but, as we'll see, there are at least some indications that it's influenced a few CDs that I own.

Should librarians care? I think so. Libraries are, among other things, in the business of collecting, organizing and preserving humanity's creativity. If music, one of the creative arts, is consistently stored in a manner that *degrades* that creativity, it's a loss to both the present and the future. And if, as I (and others) believe, dynamically compressed music is tiring, so that you're tempted to tune it out and not listen seriously, that's a loss on several levels. (If you *only* have stuff on in the background—if music is playing but you don't really listen to it—then none of this may make much sense.)

The Turn Me Up! site has lots of links to music dynamics in the news. The place most people might start—our friend *Wikipedia*—isn't bad: Look up "Loudness War." But don't stop there; several other links make good and informative reading. There's a heartening tale from Bob Ludwig, who mastered the Guns 'N Roses record *Chinese Democracy*: When he prepared three versions on a trial disc, one with minimal compression and two with more typical modern compression, the producers (including Axl) chose the *least*-compressed version: the "quietest" version, in some ways. There's clearly some public interest in this—as when (some) Metallica fans became aware that *Death Magnetic* (the CD, compressed all to hell and gone and clipped in the process) doesn't sound nearly as good as the same tracks in "Guitar Hero" downloads—which aren't *quite* as overcompressed. (In this case the band got the CD it apparently wanted.)

There are two slightly different issues here. One is the *overall* dynamic range of a piece, from softest to loudest—and to a great extent that's an issue of music type and performer preference. Orchestral music may have the widest dynamic range (although a solo piano has an astonishingly wide dynamic range); a folk singer might *seem* to have a relatively narrow range; while electronica or metal rock might *deliberately* have an extremely narrow range, loud all the time.

The other is inner dynamics—the extent to which there's breathing space within the loudest passages. The software tool I'll discuss later on, TTDR, apparently only deals with the 20% of a

piece that's loudest overall—then looks at the difference between peak loudness and average loudness within that 20%, to calculate a dynamic range. After all, most instruments aren't making sound 100% of the time and different instruments *should* have different dynamics.

Is there a textual analogy? I'm not sure, but here's a crude attempt. You can express textual emphasis by **bolding text** or using *italics* or putting a word or two in ALL CAPS. But how would you feel about a long book that began like this:

*MRANDMRSDURSLEYOFNUMBERFOUR-
PRIVETDRIVEWEREPROUDTOSAYTHAT-
THEYWEREPERFECTLYNORMALTHANKYOUVE
RYMUCHTHEYWERETHELASTPEOPLEYOU-
DEXPECTTOBEINVOLVEDINANY-
THINGSTRANGEORMYSTERIOUSBECAUSETHE
YJUSTDIDNTHOLDWITHSUCHNONSENSE*

All the words are there, and it's readable, but it's all **VERY LOUD** and has no interruptions. I don't know about you, but I'd find that awfully tiring.

Metrics 1

Paul Lamere's opening paragraph in "The Loudness War Analyzed," a March 23, 2009 post at *Music Machinery* (musicmachinery.com), states the problem in a different way:

> Recorded music doesn't sound as good as it used to. Recordings sound muddy, clipped and lack punch. This is due to the 'loudness war' that has been taking place in recording studios. To make a track stand out from the rest of the pack, recording engineers have been turning up the volume on recorded music. Louder tracks grab the listener's attention, and in this crowded music market, attention is important. And thus the loudness war—engineers must turn up the volume on their tracks lest the track sound wimpy when compared to all of the other loud tracks. However, there's a downside to all this volume. Our music is compressed. The louds are louds and the softs are loud, with little difference. The result is that our music seems strained, there is little emotional range, and listening to loud all the time becomes tedious and tiring.

The post includes some of Lamere's own experiments. For example, when he plotted Dave Brubeck's *Take Five*, he saw a dynamic range of about 18dB—but a track from the new Metallica album had a range of only 3dB, which essentially means **ALLTHEMUSICISLOUDALLTHETIME**. Impressive for a few seconds; tiresome after a few minutes.

Ah, but Brubeck's song is a jazz quartet, not heavy metal—so what of rock? Lamere measures *Stairway to Heaven* by Led Zeppelin: 35dB. But then there's *supermassive black hole* by Muse: 4dB. I've never head of Muse; Lamere says he likes the group but finds their tracks to "get boring quickly."

Lamere analyzed "about 15K tracks from the top 1,000 or so most popular artists," using his own methodology for determining dynamic range. He gives the results in –dB "loudness" numbers; I'll assume these relate to the average (RMS) level below digital 0 dB, since I'm not sure what else to make of them.

The average across all 15K tracks is about -9.5dB—but a *bunch* of artists are much louder, -5dB or less. Worst is Venetian Snares (whoever that is) at -1.25dB, essentially unvarying loudness throughout. Oddly enough, Avirl Lavigne (-3.03) is louder than Metallica (-4.14).

Then there are the "quietest artists"—which presumably means those using very little dynamic compression, not those whose engineers just master the CDs at low levels. Heading that list are Brian Eno (-17.52), Leonard Cohen (-16.24) and Norah Jones (-15.75), and the list of those below -13 includes Neil Young, Cat Stevens, the Velvet Underground, Simon & Garfunkel, James Taylor and Paul Simon—but also Pink Floyd, Phish, Phil Collins, the Police and the Grateful Dead.

Lamere's post also plots loudness against the year of release of a recording—and there's a fairly clear (if not entirely consistent) track upward, with relatively few "loud" recordings prior to 1990 and relatively few "quiet" ones since 1995.

A caution here: I'm not sure you can directly compare Lamere's results—fascinating as they are—with the dynamic range results I discuss later. The methodologies differ, although the underlying idea is the same.

Pleasurize

Now we move to the Pleasurize Music Foundation at www.pleasurizemusic.com. Here's a portion of "Our Aim" from the site, as updated July 18, 2009:

> Our aim is to improve the sound quality of music in its various recorded formats—including data compression methods such as MP3—as well as music destined for radio broadcast.
>
> Only music that provides a positive musical listening experience has real market value. The

Foundation's aim is to increase the value of music within the creative production process for the entire music industry.

The objective is to revive the willingness to pay for music and therefore to create a healthier basis for all creative participants within the music industry.

That's the start of a long page I can't really summarize. Once again, the aim is to provide a *label* for recordings indicating that they provide "natural and dynamic sound." Is such a process plausible or even desirable? I have no idea. Does it make sense to *understand* what's going on? I believe so.

If you explore the site—and I encourage you to do so, along with the Turn Me Up! site, if you care about music quality at all—don't be too surprised if the language sometimes seems a little strained. Pleasurize may be a California foundation but it began in Germany, and much of the site has the feel of English as a second language. By the way, the home page points you to a video—and it's the same video used by Turn Me Up!

TTDR, the tool provided by Pleasurize (only if you join at $30/year, but free downloads of an older version can be found) measures what the site calls the "inner dynamics of a recording" in whole numbers, as a Dynamic Range or DR. The DR is based on the cumulative difference between peak and RMS loudness, which is already more than I fully understand, and is *not* the same as "macro dynamic," the difference between (say) a quiet introduction to a song and the loudest music within the song.

The official short-term goal of the foundation, according to the site, is for recording companies who've joined to release albums with a minimum of DR14 beginning July 1, 2010—either by lessening their use of dynamic compression or by lowering average levels for those CDs where there really isn't 14dB of dynamic range. Thus, most CDs from such labels would be equally loud (or quiet) overall, but would have more natural dynamics.

This doesn't affect apparent loudness on radios, because most radio stations add their own dynamic compression—in most cases, it's all going to sound loud regardless. (The website asserts that music that's already been compressed is more likely to be distorted by radio station compression.)

There's a chart breaking down minimum suggested DR values for various types of music, calling the ranges "unpleasant," "transition" and "dynamic and pleasant" respectively:

- For largely-synthetic and sample-based music, DR6-7 is transitional and anything DR8 or higher is dynamic and pleasant *for this type of music*.
- For most pop, rock, blues, mainstream "radio music," the transitional range is DR8-11, with anything DR12 or higher being dynamic and pleasant.
- For primarily acoustic music—jazz, folk, country, classical—you need at least DR10 for transitional and DR12 for proper dynamics.

Elsewhere on the site, you get the sense that DR14 is *really* the level at which "proper dynamics" are at play for most music; I note that, on the colored chart, the acoustic music column has a yellow tint ("transitional") to the green ("dynamic") at DR12 and DR13.

I have no idea whether Pleasurize Music Foundation has signed up many *significant* producers and labels—there are lists on the site (including 71 "record company" signatures and more than 1,200 supposed recording engineers), but they're not all that meaningful. I suppose we'll find out more this year. I don't buy all that many CDs recently (or downloads—so far, none of those), so the fact that I've never seen a DR label in the wild isn't necessarily meaningful. I'm neither touting for the organization nor convinced either that it's a plausible solution or that it's hopeless.

It did inspire me to do some of my own tests—recognizing that most of the music I own predates 1995, the point at which heavy dynamic compression seemed to become the norm.

Metrics 2

I located and downloaded a free copy of an earlier version of the offline TTDR (version 1.1)—and was delighted to see that, although it *says* it only handles .WAV files (regular audio in CD-digital form), it *actually* handles vanilla MP3 as well, if a bit more slowly. Delighted, because essentially all the non-classical music in my collection (and some of the semiclassical music, that is, acoustic guitar and some piano) is stored in 320K MP3 form. I ran a few crosschecks and satisfied myself that the DR result for a 320K MP3 (the highest quality MP3 you can record) is the same as for the original .WAV.

I looked at just under 1,400 tracks—a little over half of the nonclassical part of my collection, excluding most of the songs I know I'll never want

to mix to CD-Rs or put on a USB player. That collection is mostly from the 50s and 60s and heavy on folk and pop, with many of the same artists continuing into the 70s, 80s and some since. Quite a bit of it is collections, including Sony's "Essential" 2-CD bargain sets (which typically contain the equivalent of four original CDs of music).

The results show range *within this collection*—but I have no Metallica, no Stooges, very few contemporary recordings of any sort. Given those caveats, some notes on what I found—first in terms of the actual numbers, followed by a few listening tests. It's worth noting that I had *no* idea what I'd find when I did these tests.

Overall Numbers

Of 1,394 tracks measured, the DRs come out like this. Note that 5-7 would be considered overcompressed for *any* of the music I have, with 8-11 either overcompressed (for folk, country, jazz, classical) or transitional (for rock, pop, blues, etc.):

DR	Tracks	Percentage	Note
5	1	0.07%	Compressed
6	6	0.43%	Compressed
7	17	1.22%	Compressed
8	53	3.80%	Compressed or transitional
9	100	7.17%	Compressed or transitional
10	181	12.98%	Transitional
11	243	17.43%	Transitional
12	313	22.45%	Good
13	242	17.36%	Good
14	140	10.04%	Dynamic
15	57	4.09%	Dynamic
16	26	1.87%	Dynamic
17	6	0.43%	Dynamic
18	7	0.50%	Dynamic
19	2	0.14%	Dynamic

That's not too bad overall. The worst case (all of the 8 and 9 being folk, jazz or country) shows 12.7% overcompressed, 30% transitional (not great, not terrible), 40% good (dynamic but not up to DR14 standards) and 17% fully dynamic, at or above DR14 standards. (Quite a few of the DR12 and DR13 tracks would meet DR14 standards because their peaks are 1dB or 2dB below digital 0.) The statistically-minded among you have probably already spotted something: The distribution is a classic bell-shaped curve.
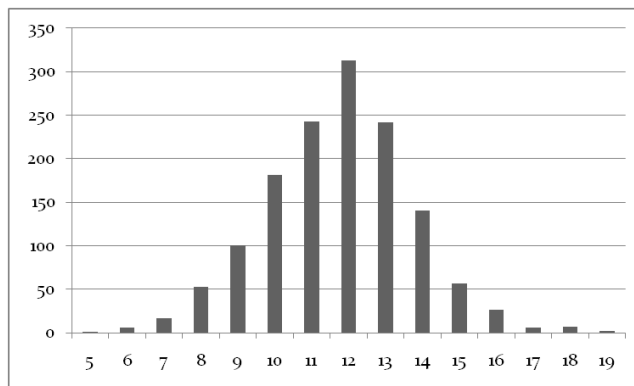
I'm guessing, based on everything I've read, that a largely-contemporary collection would also be bell-shaped—but the peak of the curve would be *considerably* to the left. (If the measure used by Paul Lamere was directly comparable to DR, the average for the 15,000 tracks he measured was 9.54, suggesting that the peak of the curve would be centered between 9 and 10.)

Overcompressed Tracks

Let's look at the tracks that fall into two extremes—those that are almost certainly overcompressed (DR 5-7) and those that are *very* dynamic (16-19). Are there identifiable characteristics?

For the worst case, DR5, the answer is clearly **Yes**: It's *Come Together* by the Beatles—from *The Beatles 1* compilation, which was almost certainly badly compressed for rerelease. Note that two more tracks from the CD have DR7 (*Something* and *Let It Be*) and five more have DR8, with three marginal at DR9 and *one* reasonably good at DR11 (*Yesterday*—which, notably, would seem to be less dynamic than most Beatles numbers). I didn't retain most of the cuts on this CD on my PC; I'm guessing most of the rest also have low DR numbers.

DR6 and DR7 are more mixed, but in a number of cases there's a likely pattern.

➢ Two of the DR6 cuts and five of the DR7 cuts are from Carly Simon's *Bedroom Tapes*, a recent (2000) self-produced album produced primarily by Simon herself in a home studio. (One other cut is DR8; I didn't keep the remaining three tracks.)

➢ One DR6 and two DR7 are by Eric Clapton in his "wall of sound" mode on *Clapton Chronicles* and *Pilgrim* (five more cuts are DR8 and three are DR9, with four DR10—none of the cuts that I kept have higher DR numbers). The worst case is *Blue Eyes Blue*; for a couple of the cuts—*(I) Get Lost* and

River of Tears, both DR7—the narrow dynamic range might be an artistic choice.

➤ The other three DR6 cuts are David Olney's *Round* from *The Wheel* (an a capella round), Randy Newman's *Old Kentucky Home* from his *Guilty* 4-disc collection (a remaster), and The Lovin' Spoonful's *Did You Ever Have to Make Up Your Mind* from a badly-done reissue combining two original Spoonful albums with no access to the master tapes.

➤ Four other DR7 tracks come from *recent* James Taylor albums—the special Hallmark *Christmas Album* and the new *Covers*. Since 11 more tracks from these albums have DR8 and seven have DR9, with one DR10 and *none* (of those I kept) higher than DR10, it's extremely likely that both albums suffered from the loudness wars—and, thinking about it, I believe *Covers* would be a lot more interesting if it had more dynamic range.

➤ Otherwise, three songs from two Sony "The Essential" collections—but those collections aren't uniformly compressed.

Very Dynamic Tracks

What about tracks with DR16 and above—noting that DR14 and DR15 also have wide dynamic range?

➤ James Taylor may have overcompressed tracks on recent albums—but *Never Die Young*, recorded in 1988, includes one of the two **DR19** tracks, four of the seven DR18, two of the six DR17, and two of the 26 DR16—and two more DR16 tracks are from other pre-1990 James Taylor CDs.

➤ The other DR19 cut is George Winston's *December*, solo piano on Windham Hill. The other DR18 tracks include two classical guitar pieces (from two different CDs by different artists) and Gordon Lightfoot's *Triangle*—notably, from a compilation CD.

➤ Other DR17 cuts include two solo acoustic guitar tracks (both Christopher Parkening, both classical), Cat Stevens' *If I Laugh*, and—oddly—*Don't Worry, Be Happy* from a cheapo collection of reggae music.

➤ The rest of DR16? Five more George Winston solo piano pieces, eight more acoustic guitar pieces from five different CDs, two more Gordon Lightfoot songs from the same compilation CD, two by Eddy Raven from a compilation CD—and single cuts by artists

as varied as Boz Scaggs (from the *Hits!* collection), Mannheim Steamroller, Paul Simon (*Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes*, from the very first CD we purchased, 24 years ago) and Randy Newman (*Change Your Ways* from the *Ragtime* soundtrack).

That's the high end. While DR15 is far more varied, there's still a lot of acoustic guitar (13 tracks), a fair amount of James Taylor (six tracks) and Gordon Lightfoot (five), along with four each from Elton John (two from collections, two not) and Paul Simon (from three CDs), three from Garth Brooks (all from the same CD) and Tom Paxton, two each from Randy Newman, Ry Cooder and Vance Gilbert—and singletons from ten others.

I've only touched on the fringes, with 91% of the music in that middle range from DR8 through DR14. Do the very dynamic cuts sound better than the apparently compressed cuts from the same artists? By and large, yes. (Would the differences be more dramatic if I included *all* the CD tracks, including ones I never expect to listen to again? I'm almost certain they would.)

A Compression Timeline?

It's clear from looking at tracks within albums, in the overall spreadsheet, that not everybody gets treated the same way. As you'd expect, classical and similar recordings (including those acoustic guitars) aren't usually compressed very much, and some smaller labels seem to avoid overcompression.

Is there a reasonably clear timeline? Just for fun, I tagged the tracks with the later of either the recording dates or the CD release dates (I couldn't always find the latter). After doing averages and standard deviations year by year, the patterns were obvious enough that I clustered them into multiyear periods—noting that anything before 1986 almost certainly has a later CD release date. The graph here may be all that needs to be said.
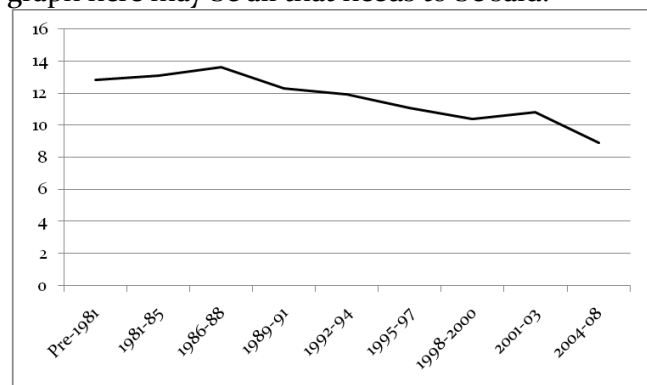
Clear enough? Maybe not, so let's summarize (noting that the first three time periods include 110-120 tracks each, the periods from 1989 through 2003 include 180 to 238 tracks each, and the 2004-08 period includes 33 tracks from three albums):

➢ Most pre-CD recordings have decent dynamic range—on average, 12.8-13.1 (with standard deviation 1.3-1.7).

➢ Albums from the early CD era (1986-1988) show *very* well, with an average DR of 13.6 (standard deviation 1.8).

➢ Then things start heading downhill—a little above or below 12 in 1989-1994, dropping sharply to 11 and below after 1995.

➢ The recent sample is too small to mean much (three albums, two from one artist), but it's appalling: 8.9. If it weren't for two tracks on Randy Newman's *Harps and Angels* with good dynamics, it would be even worse: the two James Taylor albums manage a paltry 8.2 average, with only one cut over 9. Still, that's better than the astonishing 1.5 to 3dB range of some mangled rock recordings.

Time for another digression—well, let's make it two in one. First, there's the question of whether all this has anything to do with Tom Lehrer—and it does, only because I decided to rip the Rhino CD that includes all of Lehrer's first two albums and four other cuts—this time as .wav files to play it safe. The compilation was released in 1997—and, other than the final four cuts, it's just one guy at a piano with no fancy recording technology. The DR values? One 9, ten 10 and a dozen 11—but also two 12, two 13 and one 14 (the previously unreleased *I Got It from Agnes*). Not great results, but also not atrocious. Second, I thought it might be interesting to present the *astonishing decline in recording dynamics* the way most media would—by using a little chartjunk. Here's exactly the same chart, but with one modification to make the changes more dramatic:
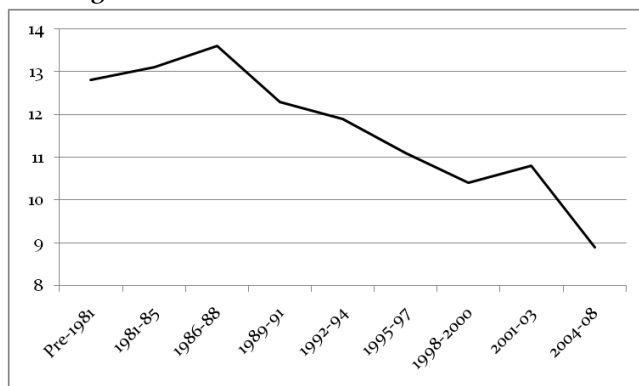
Wow! Look at that incredible drop! And if I accidentally left the numbers off the vertical axis... Well, as Smoky never said, "Only you can prevent chartjunk."

The Compilation Situation

Until 1990 and perhaps up until 1993 or 1994, it's fair to assume that most CD releases of albums that originally appeared on vinyl didn't undergo dynamic compression, or at least didn't undergo *much* of it. The same was probably true of reissued compilations.

Since 1995, compilations of older material have offered an opportunity to make the old stuff louder through compression. Some artists have resisted this (Bob Dylan has been critical of overcompression); many don't really seem to *listen* to their recordings (or no longer have the ears to hear critically). Let's look at some compilations, which make up quite a lot of my CD collection.

Sony's *The Essential* series have provided excellent value when you're trying to get a feel for an artist. Two CDs are *filled* with songs reasonably carefully chosen from all the albums recorded on Sony-affiliated labels (e.g., Columbia and Epic) and sometimes other labels: many of the CDs come in at more than 70 minutes with up to 20 songs per CD. Target sells these two-CD sets for as little as $11 to $15; I see them on Amazon for $14 to $16. Sony's still churning these out, with *dozens* of them—more than 60—covering an astonishing range of artists and groups (including ones that I never thought had any Columbia/Epic affiliation and a fair number of classical artists) and some new "eco-friendly" 3-CD sets. I have sets for Billy Joel, Bob Dylan, Dave Brubeck, Johnny Cash and Willie Nelson (looking at Amazon, I think I should add a few more...) They are, to put it bluntly, a mixed bag sonically:

➢ Billy Joel has a dozen or so at DR8-DR10—but also includes several at DR12-14, including some recent recordings, along with a bunch at DR11.

➢ Bob Dylan has a couple at DR9 and a *bunch* at DR10, showing probable signs of compression, but also a handful at 12 and above (*Don't Think Twice, It's All Right* comes in at DR14).

➢ Sony did well by Dave Brubeck. The worst track is DR10; most are DR12 or above, with three at DR14.

- Johnny Cash doesn't fare so well—*none* of the tracks (that I kept, and I kept 26 of them) reach DR12, and fully half are DR7-9, which are marginal for folk & country.
- Willie Nelson's a mixed bag, and here I kept 35 of the cuts. While 15 have DR12 or higher (including five DR13 and one, *Good Times*, at DR14), another 13 are sonically-compromised DR10-11…and, sigh, seven are down in the overcompressed DR8-9 area, including two that really should have better dynamics (*Mendocino County Line* and *Slow Dancing*). It does appear that several with poor dynamics were fairly recent recordings, and that may be indicative of a problem with Sony's country labels.

What of other compilations? Here are some of them:

- Boz Scaggs' *Hits!* originated in 1980 and shows it: tracks range from 11 to 16, most of them 12 and above.
- I didn't keep that much of *The Best of Eddy Raven*, but can't complain about the dynamics: five tracks, ranging from DR13 to DR16. (The two at DR16—*Shine, Shine, Shine* and *I Got Mexico*—are indeed vibrant recordings.)
- Elton John's four-disc 1990 collection *To Be Continued…* (did Elton really guess he'd still be doing this 19 years later?) does *not* suffer from too much compression—at least not in most cases. Of the 27 tracks I kept, only two are at DR10-11, and only seven are at the fully-acceptable DR12. The rest are mostly DR13, with half a dozen at DR14 and two at DR15.
- You already know that the 1999 *Clapton Chronicles* is sort of a mess, with tracks ranging from 6 to 10. Since the 1998 *Pilgrim* has the same range, one can only assume Clapton likes it that way—and while I find some of the songs compelling, it's true that I only want to listen to two or three at a time.
- Gordon Lightfoot's *Gord's Gold* and *Gord's Gold Vol. 2* (1975 and 1988 respectively) are both just fine—the first mostly 12-14, the second *entirely* 13-18. On the other hand, *The United Artists Collection*, which is a reissue compilation from 1993 (of much earlier material), doesn't do so well: of 42 tracks I kept, 11 have DR9-10 and another 11 are at DR11, with only seven above DR12.

- Harry Nilsson's *Personal Best* came out in 1994 and doesn't seem to involve much compression—although there's one DR10, there are a *bunch* of DR13-15 tracks.
- James Taylor's *Greatest Hits* is now 34 years old, and it shows few signs of compression: All the tracks I kept, nearly all the album, are DR13 and above. With Taylor, there's a sharp distinction between pre-1992 albums (almost always DR12 and above and as high as DR19) and those from 1997 and beyond (mostly 9-11 in 1997 and 2002 albums, even worse in 2004 and 2008).
- Judy Collins produced her own *Forever* in 1997. Of the tracks I kept, 20 are DR9-10, only 6 DR11-12, none higher.
- Paul Simon's mid-career *Negotiations & Love Songs* (1988) is what you'd expect from 1988 or maybe better: the songs I kept are all DR13-15. (That's true of most of Simon's CDs—until *You're the One* in 2000, mostly 8-11).
- Randy Newman's gargantuan *Guilty* ranges all over the place, artistically and sonically. Of what I kept (nearly four dozen tracks), I count 16 tracks below DR10 (including two below DR8), but also 16 at DR13-16. (14 are in the middle, with DR11-12.)
- Simon & Garfunkel's *Old Friends* from 1997 was probably compressed, but not as badly as it might have been. Of 48 tracks I've kept (in some cases, I had the song on the original CD and it sounded better there), three are DR9 (all of them songs that *should* be livelier than they are), ten are DR10 and 13 are DR11—but that leaves 13 at DR12 and eight at DR13, plus one DR14 (*Kathy's Song*).
- The Beach Boys massive *Good Vibrations* collection (five CDs) came out in 1993, so you wouldn't expect much dynamic compression—but that's not to say these are heavily dynamic (quite a few are partial tracks). I kept 42 of some humongous number of tracks, including six DR8-9, 17 DR10-11, 15 DR12—and five DR13-15 (the DR15? *Disney Girls*).
- OK, I know, The Carpenters made homogenized music—but while Richard Carpenter may not be the world's greatest arranger, Karen Carpenter was a remarkable vocal talent who died far too young. Richard's vast ego is

ever-present in the four-disc *From the Top*, released in 1991, but it doesn't suffer from compression. Of the 35 cuts I kept, there's one DR10 and eight DR11—but also 14 DR12, nine DR13 and three DR14.

- ➤ Tom Paxton's *I Can't Help But Wonder...* collection (1999) does pretty well, at least among the 21 tracks I kept: four DR10-11, three DR13, two DR15 and the rest DR12. That range is typical of most of his albums, although one (*It Ain't Easy* from 1991) stays down in the DR9-11 range.
- ➤ Technically, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken* "by" the Nitty Gritty Dirt Band (but mostly by a group of country's pioneer musicians) isn't a compilation—but the 2001 CD reissue doesn't sound nearly as lifelike as the stunning multi-LP originals, and it's fairly clear why: five DR8-9, eight DR10, three DR11 and a paltry two DR12 (nothing higher), of the small selection I chose to keep. (One of the two DR12 is a soft acoustic guitar solo that's also the only non-country song: *Both Sides Now*.) Too bad; the original was cleanly and simply recorded and almost certainly had more life.

Conclusions

I could discuss individual discs by various artists, but this essay's more than long enough already. I should mention that Carly Simon doesn't always cover a narrow range (for example, *No Secrets* ranges from DR12 to DR14, the latter including *You're So Vain*), that soundtrack albums vary all over the place (the 1998 *James and the Giant Peach*—there's Randy Newman again—has excellent dynamics but the 2000 *O Brother, Where Art Thou*, full of first-rate music, is mostly DR9-11), that some country artists got great recordings at least into the early 1990s (Randy Travis is mostly DR12-14, with a few exceptions; Ronnie Milsap consistently 12-15).

Can you hear the difference? I suspect most people who *listen* to music at least some of the time can—but unless you have uncompressed and overcompressed versions of the same music for comparison, it's hard to be sure.

I do suspect that, if you have music by artists whose songs you love but you find that you get bored with the music after two or three songs, you may be dealing with dynamic compression. Everything is "loud" (unless you turn it down), but at the expense of natural musical dynamics. If the compression has been done during the mixing stage, there's not much hope of redemption: As Tom Paxton sings, when it's gone, it's gone. But if the big-label music industry could get past the LOUDER IS BETTER obsession or enough artists object, there are probably thousands of recordings out there that *could* sound better, by restoring the dynamic range in the master tapes (or, these days, the master files). Although I haven't heard them yet, there's reason to believe that's happened with The Beatles; I'd love to see it happen with hundreds of other artists. For the sake of today's and yesterday's music that *deserves* to live on, let's hope we see progress.

Offtopic Perspective
Mystery Collection Part 1

This one's a little different. Most movies I review are from 12-disc, 50-movie collections. The Mystery Collection includes 250 movies on 60 DVDs, essentially combining five of the 50-movie sets that have no overlap. Assuming I keep watching old movies (*not* currently while treadmilling) and doing these review roundups, I'll be doing *ten* C&I segments on the Mystery Collection (one for each six discs)—and, with luck, should be done in about five years (since I alternate discs between two collections for variety).

Disc 1

This disc includes six hour-long movies, all part of the Bulldog Drummond series. There's one mild problem with these, seen at this late date: Without the background of the original *Bulldog Drummond* (the books or the 1929 film with Ronald Colman), one feels as though one's been dropped into the middle of an existing story. While there were more than two dozen movies with Captain (or Colonel or Major) Hugh "Bulldog" Drummond as a character and more than a dozen actors portraying Drummond, John Howard—who plays Drummond in five of these six flicks—had the longest run, with seven in all.

Bulldog Drummond's Revenge, 1937, b&w. Louis King (dir.), John Barrymore, John Howard, Louise Campbell, Reginald Denny, E.E. Clive, Frank Puglia. 0:57.

Bulldog Drummond is out to marry his fiancée, Phyllis Claverling, taking a train from London to Dover and then (on a ferry) across the English Channel in order to do so. His pal Algy Longworth and his former boss, Colonel Neilson (Barrymore), should be there for the wedding.

But things get in the way. Drummond, taking a shortcut back to his estate, sees a valise parachuting down from the sky...and it's accompanied by (and chained to) a severed arm. The valise contains a new high explosive...and the mystery is on. Lots of train scenes (some of them train-on-a-boat scenes for extra interest), mistaken identities, humor, action...well, by the end of it Phyllis is no longer so intent on Drummond settling down, and a good time has been had by all.

Well-played and charming. As a sub-hour B-movie, it's good, but can't quite get more than $1.00.

Bulldog Drummond Escapes, 1937, b&w. James P. Hogan (dir.), Ray Milland, Guy Standing, Heather Angel, Reginald Denny, Porter Hall, Fay Holden, E.E. Clive. 1:07.

Mysteriouser and mysteriouser. The sleeve description for this episode has a different Drummond, Ray Milland, once again rescuing his kidnapped fiancée Phyllis Claverling—but as I understand the movie, Drummond has never *met* Claverling at the start of the movie (but they're engaged by its end). Misdirection from Col. Neilson, houses with secret passages, spunky heroine—lots of good stuff. I was going to say it seems implausible that Drummond and Claverling would fall so rapidly in love (essentially getting engaged the same day they meet), but, well, I've been there (and still am 31.5 years later) so it's clearly possible.

Nicely done, but the print's a mess and the sound's worse, reducing this to $0.75.

Bulldog Drummond in Africa, 1938, b&w. Louis King (dir.), John Howard, Heather Angel, H.B. Warner, J. Carrol Naish, Reginald Denny, E.E. Clive, Anthony Quinn. 0:58.

Back to the apparently normal pattern: Bulldog Drummond ready to wed Phyllis Claverling until Something Terrible Interferes. This one's played for laughs at first, with Drummond and his Man both pantsless and without funds to make sure they don't go anywhere (and dancing around in improvised kilts), Phyllis, Col. Neilson and Algy all on their way to put wedding in motion—when Neilson is kidnapped and, you got it, flown off to Africa.

We get more indication of just *how* wealthy Drummond is—he goes chasing them off to Africa in his own private multipassenger plane (we al-

ready knew he had an estate). We also get corrupt Morrocan police, "pet" lions and plenty of action. Interesting: Phyllis this time is the same actress as in *Escapes* (with a different Drummond) but not the same as in *Revenge*); Nielsen's a different actor from time to time; but Reginald Denny and E.E. Clive (Algy and Drummond's man 'Tenny' Tennison) are constants. The young (23 year old) Anthony Quinn is impressive as a henchman, although the part's not huge—and, of course, J. Carrol Naish does a fine job as a suave villain. Fun, but the print's not very good. Still, worth $1.00.

Bulldog Drummond's Secret Police, 1939, b&w. James P. Hogan (dir.), John Howard, Heather Angel, H.B. Warner, Reginald Denny, E.E. Clive, Elizabeth Pattern, Leo G. Carroll, Forrester Harvey. 0:56.

This one really should be at the end of Side 2, as it's later than the others and includes clips from some of them. This time, dear Phyllis is accompanied by a cranky aunt who thinks she should dump Drummond anyway—and, while all is set for the wedding, suddenly there's a classic absent-minded professor who believes there's hidden treasure in Drummond's estate. Add in a new butler (not replacing Tenny—in this case, the butler is *not* in charge), played by Leo Carroll, who isn't what he seems to be, a maze of hidden passages in the largely-unused tower set to be the wedding scene, and we have another Drummond romp.

Oh, and this time it's *clearly* Algy's enthusiastic incompetence that prevents the wedding from actually happening. He's fun, but he's a thorough idjit. Lots of physical comedy, just enough Peril, more killings than usual by a great villain. The "secret police"? Well, local police do play a role in this one, but there's nothing secret about them. I guess they needed a title. Good print. I'll give it $1.00.

Bulldog Drummond Comes Back, 1937, b&w. Louis King (dir.), John Barrymore, John Howard, Louise Campbell, Reginald Denny, E.E. Clive, J. Carrol Naish, Helen Freeman. 1:04 [0:57].

The plot, apart from Drummond's friends gathering once again for that impending marriage: An old villain, Mikhail Valdin (J. Carrol Naish again, nowhere near so suave but in league with a woman seeking revenge for Drummond sending her husband to the gallows), has kidnapped Phyllis and sends Drummond on a complex chase to solve clues, frequently provided as one-off phonograph records.

Hmm. That's really about it. Oh, Neilsen (back to John Barrymore) takes delight in impersonating a grizzled old fisherman and even more grizzled old something else; Algy *almost* manages to put an end to all this by trying to light a cigarette in a

room filling with gas; Algy's married (which he didn't seem to be in a later flick) and it's time to christen his son; and "Tenny" Tennison is as ever a wealth of good sense. One item that seems to validate *Bulldog Drummond Escapes*: Tennison expresses doubts as to the advisability of the marriage, and Drummond asks whether it's because he proposed to the woman only an hour after meeting her. Poor print (and seven minutes' missing footage) reduces this one to $0.75.

Bulldog Drummond's Peril, 1938, b&w. James P. Hogan (dir.), John Barrymore, John Howard, Louise Campbell, Reginald Denny, E.E. Clive. 1:06.

A little different, although not much. This one's partly set (supposedly) in Switzerland, at Phyllis' family villa, and the couple are inspecting all the "loot" that's coming in (wedding gifts). The latest piece of loot is a big, beautiful diamond—one created artificially by Algy's father-in-law. One of the wedding guests is head of the British arm of the diamond cartel...and the plot's afoot.

Much of this plot depends on an assumption that American scientists—or at least *one* American scientist—are amoral villains only in it for the money. Thus we have the noble Brit, perfectly willing to destroy the diamond industry with his huge, nearly-free-to-make diamonds (that somehow emerge as fully-cut multifaceted gems with one casual strike of a mallet to the crude original) and who won't take money to suppress the invention—versus the evil American who wants control of the formula so he can sell it to the cartel for a substantial fortune. There is an interesting bullwhip-vs.-sword fight (naturally, the amoral American scientist is an expert with a bullwhip), and Tennison riding an early motorcycle is fun.

Otherwise, it's just another "almost but not quite married" B-film in the mildly entertaining series. Not a great print, and I can't give it more than $0.75.

Disc 2

Four more B movies, each roughly an hour long—three Dick Tracy, one The Shadow. Most of the way through the first, I realized that I'd seen it before: Five years ago, on a freebie old-movie set that preceded the megapacks. But, of course, since the two aren't from the same company, the print quality might be different, and it's only an hour, so... (The second Tracy was also on the earlier set.)

*Dick Tracy Detective (*aka *Dick Tracy)*, 1945, b&w. William Berke (dir.), Morgan Conway, Anne Jeffreys, Mike Mazurki, Jane Greer, Lyle Latell, Joseph Crehan, Mickey Kuhn. 1:01.

This movie has some of the virtues of comic books (snappy dialogue) but more depth to its characters than you might expect—and it's not played as a live-action comic strip. It's no wonder Tess Trueheart (Jeffreys), Tracy's fiancée, is so slender: They never manage to go out to dinner and she's mostly waiting up for him. For good reason: There have been three slashing murders, each apparently linked to a payment demand from "Splitface," and the mayor's terrified because he's received such a demand. Other than the murder method and the payment demand, they don't seem to have anything in common. Dick Tracy is, of course, on the job.

Turns out they *do* have something in common—and unless Tracy intercedes, there will soon be 15 deaths in all. There's an astrologer/astronomer who sees a little more in his crystal ball than is strictly healthy and an undertaker named "Deathridge." It all comes to a head in a satisfying manner for a flick of this particular genre. Not great art, but well done of its kind. Only some blips in the generally-good print lower this to $0.75.

Dick Tracy Meets Gruesome, 1947, b&w. John Rawlins (dir.), Boris Karloff, Ralph Byrd, Anne Gwynne, Edward Ashley. 1:05.

Gruesome being Boris Karloff—really not in any way gruesome enough for the name, but it's just as well that they didn't make him up badly. The story this time is that he's out of prison, wants a new score and tracks down a scientist who's developed a freeze-bomb: A grenade that releases a gas that paralyzes people for a short time. What a great way to rob a bank!

Ah, but Tess is in the bank, happens to be using an enclosed phone booth and so, unlike everybody in a very large bank, doesn't get frozen. (Apparently they had airtight phone booths back in the day...) She calls Dick and the chase is on...

More plot, less character. Trademark comic book names: Dr. Lee Thal, Dr. I.M. Learned, Dr. A. Tomic. A different Tracy (Byrd), who I found perhaps more lantern-jawed but less appealing. The frozen-people effects are amusing, but I found this one considerably less appealing than the first. The print's fine, so it all balances out to the same: $0.75.

Dick Tracy vs. Cueball, 1946, b&w. Gordon Douglas (dir.), Morgan Conway, Anne Jeffreys, Lyle Latell, Rita Corday, Ian Keith, Esther Howard. 1:02.

Cueball is one of several aliases for a bald crook just out of prison, who's obtained some stolen rare gems and strangled a person (aboard a docked cruise ship) in the process, using a knotted leather strip that turns out to be a hatband made in Cueball's prison.

The plot involves a jeweler and his employees (the jeweler apparently honest, employees not so much), an antique dealer (decidedly less than upstanding) along with Vitamin Flintheart and the usual cast. Several murders, some saloon action, a high-speed car chase or two, and Tracy's sidekick getting knocked out again. We get some of those classic Tracy names—Jules Sparkle (jeweler), Percival Priceless (crooked antique dealer), Filthy Flora (proprietor of the Dripping Dagger saloon). The end of Cueball is dramatic, if a bit unsatisfying.

For some reason, I found this the most enjoyable of the Tracy trio—the tone, acting and plot all seemed to gel nicely. Ian Keith is a hoot as the eccentric Vitamin Flintheart and Dick Wessel does a solid job as Harry 'Cueball' Lake. The print's good, although the sound has some background noise. It's still a one-hour B flick, but I'll give it $1.00.

The Shadow Strikes, 1937, b&w. Lynn Shores (dir.), Rod La Rocque, Agnes Anderson, James Blakely, Walter McGrail. 1:01.

Man-about-town Lamont Cranston swoops down on criminals, shrouded in a black cape, while still trying to solve the mystery of his father's murder. Because of such swooping, he winds up impersonating a lawyer and witnessing the death of a wealthy man about to change his will—and, of course, must work to find the murderer.

All nicely done—but the movie Shadow has no apparent ability to cloud men's minds or anything of the sort. He's just quiet and sneaky. He doesn't even wear a disguise. The movie uses none of the classic Shadow lines—and at times Cranston's last name seems to begin with a "G." It's a decent B flick, but nothing special. $0.75.

Disc 3

The Shadow: International Crime (aka *International Crime*), 1938, b&w. Charles Lamont (dir.), Rod La Rocque, Astrid Allweyn, Thomas EE. Jackson, Oscar O'Shea, Wilhelm von Brincken, William Pawley, Tenen Holtz, Lew Hearn. 1:02.

Another Shadow movie, but although the actor's the same, Lamont Cranston's *very* different: A criminologist who has a column, *The Shadow*, in the newspaper and a nightly radio show. He's witty, he picks on the police commissioner, he solves crimes—and he plays an odd mix of trying to keep the two identities separate and the fact that pretty much everybody knows that The Shadow *is* Lamont Cranston.

Ability to cloud men's minds continues to be non-existent. Quiet and sneaky? Not this time around. The plot has to do with a murder disguised as rob-

bery (blowing up a safe), a just-released safecracker who's appalled that such a sloppy job is being blamed on him, an *extremely* upset police commissioner, a cravenly newspaper editor...and an "international crime" that's a little hard to follow. But the dialogue is snappy, Cranston's assistant—a young woman who's the publisher's niece and really wants to do a great job, but can't dial a telephone to save her life—is a charmer, and it moves right along. Defects: Any time there's orchestral music it's very badly distorted, and there are a few missing syllables here and there. Still, and noting that it's another short B flick, I'll give it $1.00.

Mr. Moto's Last Warning, 1939, b&w. Norman Foster (dir.), Peter Lorre, Ricardo Cortez, Virginia Field, John Carradine, George Sanders. 1:11.

Can you buy Peter Lorre as a gap-tooth Japanese detective—specifically, one who works with international police agencies just prior to World War II, in this case to assure that Britain and France don't go to war with one another?

If you can engage your willful suspension of disbelief that far, the story involves a small band of fairly incompetent foreign agents (and what actors!) planning to mine the Suez Canal and destroy the French fleet, arriving for a joint British-French exercise. Moto has a way of getting associates and assistants killed, but manages to survive. Definitely entertaining, frequently a little over the top. $1.25.

The Mysterious Mr. Wong, 1934, b&w. William Nigh (dir.), Bela Lugosi, Wallace Ford, Arline Judge, E. Alyn Warren, Lotus Long, Robert Emmett O'Connor, Edward Peil Sr., Luke Chan. 1:03.

Mr. Wong, an evil mastermind with three badly-dressed murderous minions and a frightened niece, is having people in Chinatown killed to take from them the Twelve Coins of Confucius, which would give him control of a Chinese province—and which, somehow, have all come to be in an American Chinatown. (So far, he has 11—and the twelfth resides with, what else, a Chinese laundryman.) The cops and press cry "Tong war" and don't do much of anything (including keeping a wise-ass journalist from entirely corrupting a murder scene) except come up with lots of stereotypical comments. The wise-ass journalist, also full of stereotypical comments, somehow manages to save the day. Oh, and get the girl.

The good news? The wise-ass journalist is amusing, the plot moves right along, the print's decent and, other than a continuous background noise level, the sound's OK.

The bad news? The thought that putting a "Chinese" mustache on Bela Lugosi makes him a Chi-

nese master criminal; the general attitudes portrayed in the movie, the sheer level of stereotyping. On balance, reluctantly, $0.75.

Mr. Wong—Detective, 1938, b&w. William Nigh (dir.), Boris Karloff, Grant Withers, Maxine Jennings, Evelyn Brent, George Lloyd, Lucien Prival, John St. Polis, William Gould. 1:10.

Same studio (Monogram). Same director. Same "Wong." Once again, a non-Asian in the title role.

That's about all this picture and the one above have in common. This one's definitely set in San Francisco, not in some anonymous metropolis. This one doesn't have stereotyped Irish cops or whole bunches of stereotyped Chinese-Americans—indeed, the title character and his servant are essentially the only Asians in the movie. Oh, and Mr. Wong in this case is clearly highly educated, speaks with a refined accent...and is a brilliant detective with whom the police willingly partner.

Boris Karloff turns out to be good for the role, with a normal mustache instead of a Fu Manchu parody and with no artificial Chinese mannerisms (he does dress in a silk robe at home, but why not?). He doesn't chew the scenery; if anything, he underacts a bit. He's well-mannered, soft-spoken and dignified. But he *sees* things—like any good detective—and uses scientific exploration to uncover the truth.

The plot's fairly interesting. One of three owners of a chemical plant calls Wong because he thinks he's being threatened—and, the next morning, when Wong arrives to discuss it with the owner (who has, by the way, just signed a mutual contract by which any dying partner automatically leaves his portion to the others), the owner's dead—in a locked room, after an enormous red herring of a fight involving the creator of a "formula" (apparently for poison gas). Over the course of the movie, Wong recreates a murder weapon based on very little physical evidence but the cooperation of a nearby university lab; there are more deaths; a highly ingenious trigger mechanism comes into play; and...well, it's quite a plot and, remarkably, all makes good internal sense.

Negatives: There's background noise in part, but not all, of the soundtrack—and, well, Karloff is about as Chinese as I am. Positives: Well played, well plotted, well filmed. This was the first of six Mr. Wong movies; unfortunately (in this case), I don't believe the set includes any others. On balance, $1.25.

Disc 4

The Sign of Four, 1932, b&w. Graham Cutts (dir.), Arthur Wontner, Isla Bevan, Ian Hunter, Graham

Soutten, Miles Malleson, Herbert Lomas, Roy Emerton. 1:15 [1:13].

I came to this one positively predisposed. I enjoyed a couple of early Sherlock Holmes flicks in another set, I like the published stories. Unfortunately, the movie let me down—partly because of print sound problems (heavy noise overlay through much of the picture) that made it difficult to enjoy. I'm not sure that was all of it; it felt like very little "legitimate Holmes" and lots of cliché Holmes, with some odd action thrown in. (Two people rolling around on the floor with thumping noises may be how a fight actually happens, but it's lousy cinema.)

Actually, the movie's roughly half over before Holmes enters at all. Two top men at a prison make a deal with a one-legged lifer to find a treasure, let him and another escape and split the treasure four ways—and, naturally, one of the two kills the other and completely ignores the deal. Many years later, the prisoners escape and the action starts—part of it involving the peculiar choice to make the less-evil prisoner (who was a couple of months away from release anyway) a Tattooed Man, thus making him instantly identifiable. There's a little remorse added, by the old man who got all the treasure, has used enough of it to establish a comfortable lifestyle for his family, and now wants to give part of it to the daughter of the partner he betrayed—who, when she gets part of it and senses she's in danger, goes to Holmes.

That's enough of the plot...except that, in this case, it appears that Dr. Watson and the daughter become engaged at the end of the flick. We get a little of the brilliant (or absurd) Holmes "deductions" and a lot of the tired sayings. We get over-the-top disguises. We get Scotland Yard treating Holmes as irrelevant but simultaneously giving him all the help he requests. I dunno, maybe I'm being too harsh, but I can't give this more than $0.75.

The Triumph of Sherlock Holmes, 1935, b&w. Leslie S. Hiscott (dir.), Arthur Wontner, Lyn Harding, Ian Fleming, Leslie Perrins, Jane Carr, Charles Mortimer, Michael Shepley, Ben Weldon. 1:24 [1:19].

Same Holmes, different Watson (same first name!), and to my mind a considerably better movie—partly because, while there's still sound distortion, it's now a low warbling that doesn't entirely disrupt the movie. We don't get Holmes in disguise; we do get the death (apparently) of Moriarty.

Holmes is retiring and moving to the country...at which point Inspector Lestrade calls him in to help with the murder of a local, who was apparently a member of the Scowlers, an infamous

American society of coal miners somehow affiliated with the Freemasons (or Freemen?). We get a long, long backstory, quite well done—and then we return to a present with coded messages, secret passages, mistaken identities (or, rather, deliberate identity fraud), a murder that isn't and more. All in all, a ripping adventure—but with the sound quality, the best I can do is $1.25.

Murder at the Baskervilles (aka Silver Blaze), 1937, b&w. Thomas Bentley (dir.), Arthur Wontner, Ian Fleming, Lyn Harding, John Turnbull, Lawrence Grossmith. 1:11 [1:05].

The incident of the dog in the night—one of the classic Holmesian bits (used here, if perhaps not uniquely). Holmes and Watson take vacation at Baskerville Manor and immediately get dragged into an investigation by Inspector Lestrade. A prize horse has been kidnapped, the stable boy/guard poisoned—and when Holmes and Watson go out to the moors to investigate, they find the horse's trainer, dead.

Lots of detecting, some interesting twists, Professor Moriarty in rare (and scenery-chewing) form, Holmes alternating between treating Lestrade as an idiot and as a respected colleague. Wontner comes off well as Holmes, as do Ian Fleming as Watson and Lyn Harding as Moriarty. (This appears to be the tale in which Lestrade—John Turnbull—first accepts that Moriarty *is* a villain. On the other hand, it appears that Moriarty and the Baskervilles are both elements that weren't in the original story.) Quite well done, and most of the time the sound is OK. $1.50.

The Woman in Green, 1945, b&w. Roy William Neill (dir.), Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Hillary Brooke, Henry Daniell. 1:08.

Different Sherlock (the much better known Basil Rathbone, who I find no better or worse than Wontner), different Watson (Nigel Bruce, who comes off as somewhat of a useless fathead), different Moriarty (well, he's already died once…), and no Lestrade—oh, and clearly done on a considerably larger budget than the shoestring Wontner flicks.

Plot? Young women are being murdered in London, with no common theme of location, class, employment or anything else—except that in every case the right forefinger is cleanly removed. Turns out to have a lot to do with blackmail and even more to do with hypnotism—and did I mention that Professor Moriarty is involved?

Really quite good, and both the print and sound quality were fine. In some ways, I like Wontner's Holmes better—and in almost every way I like

Fleming's Watson better. That said, this is a good film; I'll give it $1.50.

Disc 5

A Study in Scarlet, 1933, b&w. Edwin L. Marin (dir.), Reginald Owen, Anna May Wong, June Clyde, Alan Dinehart, John Warburton, Alan Mowbray, Warburton Gamble. 1:12.

This one has plenty of plot (pretty much unrelated to the story), including coded newspaper ads, mysterious rhyming messages with corpses and an odd group that turns into a tontine, with the survivor(s) collecting what's left. There's also a foreclosed mansion with secret passages and a plucky heroine.

Unfortunately, Reginald Owens is by far the least interesting and plausible Sherlock Holmes I've ever seen—if anything, he's blander than Lestrade (or Lastrade in this movie's credits). Additonally, the print has awful sound quality and a mediocre-to-worse picture. All in all, I can't give this more than $0.50.

Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon, 1943, b&w. Roy William Neill (dir.), Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Lionel Atwill, Dennis Hoey, William Post Jr., Kaaren Verne. 1:20 [1:08].

This one's wildly anachronistic, since it begins with a disguised Holmes off in Europe bringing a scientist back to England with his newfangled bombsight, to protect the sight from falling into the hands of Nazis and so that British bombers will have it.

Anachronistic, yes. A WWII propaganda film of sorts, absolutely (Holmes' final speech is classic war propaganda). But also a good Holmes flick, with a fair amount of plot, Lestrade, Holmes and Watson in the thick of things, two showdowns between Holmes and Moriarty (with Moriarty apparently plunging to his death this time around), a coded message (the only link to the Doyle source) and more. Nigel Bruce is still a somewhat fatuous Watson, but it works better this time around—and Rathbone is just fine as Holmes. It's also an excellent print with fine sound quality.

As it happens, I'd seen this movie five years ago, in the set of free DVDs I got from a long-since-departed DVD magazine. The difference: That version was a very poor print, difficult to watch. Sometimes, a good print makes a difference. I'll give this one $1.25.

Terror by Night, 1946, b&w. Roy William Neill (dir.), Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Alan Mowbray, Dennis Hoey, Renee Godfrey, Frederick Worlock. 1:00.

Mysteries on trains: A stock setting that always adds several elements. This time, we begin with the fabulous Star of Rhodesia, a 400+-carat diamond that's brought doom to its owners. Currently, the owner is a dowager who bought it to London and is going back to Edinburgh; her son hires Holmes to make sure the gem gets there safely.

We know it's going to be fun even before the train moves. Another familiar face also gets on the added day compartment that the dowager and Holmes are both on—Inspector Lestrade, supposedly off on a fishing vacation (a month before the season). Watson almost misses the train, and jumps on with a long-time acquaintance who...well, that would be telling. Moriarty's still dead at this point—but there's his sidekick Moran to deal with.

We get swapped jewels, several guilty parties (guilty of various things, including swiping a hotel coffeepot), death on the train, discussions of curry, and a remarkable (if contrived) set of scenes in the long climax. There are enough red herrings to stock a Communist fishmarket and an irascible mathematics professor who really *should* be the villain. It's all high Holmesian drama...although this time Watson is, if anything, even more of a bumbling idiot than in other movies. The sound's not perfect, but it's still a great romp and a fun watch. Noting that, as with the others, this is a one-hour flick, I'll give it $1.25.

Dressed to Kill, 1946, b&w. Roy William Neill (dir.), Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, Patricia Morison, Frederick Worlock. 1:16 [1:08].

We begin in a prison where one convict, working on music boxes, is approached by another who suggests that the first can get a shorter sentence if he'll just talk—which he won't. Then to an auction house where three identical (and dull) music boxes are auctioned off to three different people—and, later in the day, a man frantically calls at the now-closed auctioneer to buy the music boxes (and pays to see who *did* buy them).

And we're off. We have murder, mayhem and music boxes—and Holmes proves to be an expert whistler with an eidetic memory for tunes, along with his violin playing (on display in this flick). The music boxes turn out to be clues toward finding a set of engraving plates for five-pound notes—that is, *real* engraving plates. There's a female villain. Watson is even more stupefyingly incompetent than usual even for Nigel Bruce's version.

Not as satisfying as some of the others; the print's not as good, there are slight sound problems and somehow this one just didn't come off as well. Still, not bad. (Note that the 1:08 running time on the

actual disc somehow shows up as 108 minutes—that is, full feature length—on the sleeve!) $1.00.

Disc 6

Nancy Drew, Reporter, 1939, b&w. William Clemens (dir.), Bonita Granville, John Litel, Frankie Thomas, Mary Lee, Dickie Jones. 1:08.

It's fluff, but it's really *good* fluff. Nancy Drew (who manages to combine being quite grown up, her own car and all, with being somewhat innocent—a tough act!), daughter of a prominent attorney, enters a newspaper's contest for the best reportage from a high schooler—and turns it into an investigation into a poisoning and frameup. It's more comedy than mystery, and Drew is all spunk and wits throughout.

Drew's relationship to her neighbor Ted is strange, but that's part of the charm, although Ted's nasty tween sister and male friend, brats who suddenly turn professional entertainers when required, are a little hard to take. It's hard not to love the scenes in a Chinese restaurant with a full-scale Chinese big band, all in traditional outfits—and the whole hotel sequence near the end is a long, complicated hoot.

The print's fairly good and the whole thing's quite a romp. It's short (and not that mysterious), so I'll only give it $1.25.

The Kennel Murder Case, 1933, b&w. Michael Curtiz (dir.), William Powell, Mary Astor, Eugene Pallette, Ralph Morgan, Robert McWade, Robert Barrat, Frank Conroy. 1:13.

Philo Vance raises prize dogs as well as doing some amateur detecting—and after his dog comes in second in breed, he chats with some irritating folks at the kennel club. The most irritating of all turns up dead the next morning, in a room bolted from the inside and with locked windows, an apparent suicide by gunshot. Only Vance, who's told about it as he's about to sail off on a cruise, doesn't *think* it's suicide, cancels the cruise and the fun begins.

William Powell as Philo Vance—right there, you can assume an enjoyable movie. You get the detective (Pallette) who's all too ready to call it a suicide and declare the case over, even when it's demonstrated that the guy died from a knife wound and suffered a blow to the head before that. You get the irritable coroner (Girardot) who gets called out twice while he's trying to eat lunch (yes, twice—there's another victim, the chief suspect in the first murder). You get a DA (McWade) who, for some reason, consistently pronounces the noun "suspect" as though it's the adjective, accenting the second syllable. You get the niece (Astor, fine as always) who admits she had reason to kill the victim (but didn't). Lots of odd little mus-

taches, romantic intrigue, and a victim who had nothing *but* suspects, since all those who knew him had reason to despise him.

It all works out in the end, of course, in a movie that's mostly detection, well played and quite nicely done. (Turns out I'd seen it before, five years ago in an entirely unrelated set of public domain movies—but it was well worth watching again.) Decent print, but with just enough missed frames and syllables to be irritating, which is what reduces this to $1.50.

The Death Kiss, 1932, b&w. Edwin L. Marin (dir.), David Manners, Adrienne Ames, Bela Lugosi, John Wray, Vince Barnett, Alexander Carr, Edward Van Sloan. 1:15 [1:10].

Movies within movies are good plot devices, and this movie takes place almost entirely on the set of *The Death Kiss* and other areas of the studio. Seems an actor who's being shot at by eight other actors, with the usual blanks, was also being shot by someone *not* using blanks. The victim's a Lothario, with lots of possible enemies. A little early amateur sleuthing, recovering a fragment of the bullet, demonstrates that this wasn't a prop man's accident: The fatal bullet's a different caliber than the prop guns.

This time, a screenwriter who's in love with the heroine of the flick (who's been arrested as a likely suspect) becomes amateur detective (aided by a nearly-Keystone Kops-style studio cop) in order to find the *real* culprit. The real cops are, as you might imagine, less than overjoyed about the help. (If you're wondering, Bela Lugosi is the studio head, in a relatively small but significant part, played entirely straight.)

Good setup—but I found the plot wanting and the movie a lot less interesting than I'd hoped. It doesn't help that this print has those little gaps that lose a syllable or word, making some of the dialogue hard to understand. It's also noisy (background noise). All things considered, I come out with $1.00.

Suddenly, 1954, b&w. Lewis Allen (dir.), Frank Sinatra, Sterling Hayden, James Gleason, Nancy Gates, Kim Charney, Willis Bouchey, Paul Frees. 1:15.

In the sleepy little California town of Suddenly (it has something to do with the gold rush, although Suddenly seems to be slightly north of LA), the President's going to arrive on a special 5:00 train, to go off on vacation. The sheriff (Hayden) and nearby cops cooperate with Secret Service agents who arrive on the regular 1:30 train to make sure everything's secure—and that includes paying a courtesy visit to the house on the hill (with a direct sightline

to the train station), where lives a retired Secret Service agent—he was the boss of the head of this detail—and his widow daughter, whom the Sheriff is trying (unsuccessfully) to woo.

That's just the start of this excellently-acted, tautly-plotted, "half-time" movie (that is: the movie's about 1:15 long and it covers only a little more than twice as much real time—from 1:30 to about 5:02). The kicker here is Frank Sinatra and two friends, who show up first at the house on the hill, saying they're FBI agents there to protect the president. (After the father protests that the IRS protects the president, Sinatra says the agencies are cooperating.) But Sinata's really an assassin, a pure mercenary out to collect the second half of a half-million-dollar fee.

Quite a movie, with Sinatra doing a remarkable job and all the rest acting credibly. It's a thriller more than a mystery, and it's excellent. I'd actually seen it several years ago, but thoroughly enjoyed seeing it again. About the only negatives are a couple of glitches and slight print damage; even so, it's worth $1.75.

Summing Up

No fully satisfactory classics, no complete and absolute losses. At one extreme, one flick was only worth $0.50 and eight, mostly one-hour B flicks, only $0.75. At the other, *Suddenly* gets a credible $1.75 despite some damage—and three movies earn a solid $1.50 each.

Adding it all up, I get $27.25, or $20.75 if you leave out everything under a buck. For the first 10th (yes, *tenth)* of a $45-$50 set, not bad.

Masthead

Comments should be sent to waltcrawford@gmail.com. *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* is copyright © 2010 by Walt Crawford: Some rights reserved.

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ10i2.pdf