Cites & Insights

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Making it Work
Philosophy and Future

Think of this as the remainder of the long December 2009 essay, MAKING IT WORK: PURPOSE, VALUES AND ALL THAT JAZZ. I was hoping this would be shorter (an ongoing theme for 2010: see how it works out!)—but you know how it goes.

These pieces fall into two clusters: comments on the philosophy and values of libraries and reactions to a couple of high-profile statements on the present and future of libraries and librarians.

Notes on current editorial practice:

➢ I generally do *not* cite a URL if it's readily discoverable—particularly since blogs move.

➢ I *normally* use blog post titles as subheadings with the same orthography (capitalization, etc.) as in the original. Same goes for quoted titles.

➢ I had been giving *blog* names with all words except the first lowercased. I'm moving to using the same orthography as the original—the version in the browser page heading when usage is internally inconsistent (which isn't at all uncommon).

➢ I'm not as consistent as I should be.

Philosophy

The items noted here may seem miscellaneous—but they're all on aspects of library philosophy. Three date back to 2008; two are from late 2009 and early 2010.

There's more to "finding" than we thought
This post (by Steven Bell on March 26, 2008 at *ACRLog*) considers a Pew Internet study indicating that most search-engine users (92%!) are confident of their searching skills, 87% say they have "successful search experiences most of the time" and 17% say "they always find the information for which they are looking." Bell's not so sure:

If most Americans are using Google to find the latest information on Paris Hilton or the Academy Awards ceremony, I imagine they find what they need. But in the event they don't immediately and easily find what they seek, some poor search behavior is likely to emerge.

He points to a Jakob Nielsen Alertbox item (February 4, 2008 indicating that most searchers "are incredibly bad at **finding**" because they don't know how to search. Nielsen cites three problems (quoting Bell's paraphrases):

➢ Inability to retarget queries to a different search strategy (i.e., revise the strategy)

➢ Inability to understand the search results and properly evaluate each destination site's likely usefulness

➢ Inability to sort through the SERP's polluted mass of poor results, to really address whether a site meets the user's problem (SERP=Search Engine Results Page).

Inside This Issue

Bell brings it back to libraries:

As academic librarians we assumed that end-users only had trouble with our catalogs and library databases because they were oriented to librarian-style searching (which only appeals to librarians), and that making all library databases more like search engines in order to facilitate finding (which is what everyone else wants to do) would bring about a new golden age of end-user information retrieval. I see two significant flaws in that vision. First, end-users clearly have a hard time finding information on ultra-findable Google if their first effort fails, and second, the solution to the first problem is better search skills–the type of skills that librarians use to find information.

Most of the post discusses Louis Rosenfield and his thoughts on searching and finding, including the formula "browse + search + ask = find." I'd suggest you go directly to the post, given that I either mi-

sunderstand or disagree with both Rosenfield's notion that "finding is arguably at the center of all user experiences" and Bell's assertion that "what we all want is to 'create.'" I *will* agree that nearly all searching aims toward finding—but finding is normally a waystation to *using* and using can involve many different things, creation being only one of them (a relatively uncommon one, I believe).

If there's an underlying message here that I believe is correct, it's the message that libraries and librarians still have key roles in helping users to make effective use of resources, both physical and digital—that *getting people to the resources they will find useful* will continue to be a core part of library philosophy and practice. Academic librarians have tended to stress the "teach them how to fish" approach—hoping that lessons on search strategies and bibliographic instruction will make students better researchers. Public librarians mostly (I believe) tend toward the "give them the fish" approach—directly helping the user determine what it is they really want, and getting them to it, without a particular instructional stress.

It's not just searching. Arranging books on shelves according to a meaningful call number system (or, for items without call numbers such as fiction in most public libraries, at least a *recognizable* system) is a way to help users *browse* effectively, so they can find the resources that suit their desires. Or, rather, not so much *find* as *determine and acquire*. Maybe that's the difficulty with online searching as well: Not so much the difficulty in finding—but the difficulty in *determining* which answers will suit your goals (and then acquiring or making use of those answers).

When I find things at my public library, it's usually through browsing (occasionally aided by catalog searches)—and it's usually not to create but to learn or enjoy. When I tag things in delicious, either through blog posts, FriendFeed comments or other means, it's almost always to *organize* so I can get back to resources—and that's for creation. When I search using a search engine, the purposes and results can vary widely.

Discovery skills versus evaluation skills

This related item is from Kathryn Greenhill, posting on June 25, 2008 at *Librarians Matter*. She wonders whether academic librarians have the wrong emphasis:

Should academic libraries be obsessing so much about teaching the *discovery* of resources? Should we turn more attention to teaching the *evaluation* of resources? Who was Professor Rudolph G Briggs of the Department of Psychotechnology and did he really have to die in the pursuit of information literacy?

Greenhill notes a UK study on academic library futures that includes this assertion:

> The business case for the library is predicated on the assumption that the library is the authoritative source of information, and presents optimum access to the best and most appropriate resources in the most efficient way. This raises a dynamic tension between 'reliable' and 'suspect' sources and questions about the nature of authority.

I'm not an academic librarian, but I find that assertion interesting and a bit suspect, although it sets up a great construct to be beaten down in the context of Google and increasingly available sources of various times.

Greenhill continues (in part):

> Academic libraries seem to be focusing so much energy and attention on discovery tools. Tweaking them, trying to get them to play nicely together, and even turning our attention to the usability of our websites. Vendors are trying to sell us ill-defined "vertical searches" that try to emulate Google's simplicity but claim to eliminate Google's noise.
>
> A lot of energy in information literacy classes seems to go into ensuring our students understand our discovery tools. In the last couple of years, some libraries have been trying approaches like starting with Google as an entre to showing their own discovery tools...

I would question what percentage of a typical academic library's budget goes toward improvement of discovery tools: Is it 5%? 1%? Whatever, Greenhill wonders whether it's misdirected:

> I wonder whether we should shift our focus much, much more toward the evaluation of resources, rather than the discovery of them. The student who only ever uses Google, the academic who bans it and the librarian who only teaches about resources "owned" by the library all have one thing in common–they are focusing on the source and not the resource. They are privileging the means of retrieval, rather than what is retrieved.
>
> Surely it would make more sense to teach students how to work out whether an item is authoritative, well researched and/or suitable for citing in an academic work (these factors do not always overlap). Instead of a small section of an information

literacy class, what if evaluation of resources was made central?... Knowing how to assess whether a retrieved resource is fit for the purpose would "inoculate" our students against using inappropriate discovery tools.

I'm sympathetic to that suggestion—but then Greenhill asks a key question and offers the same answer I would offer:

> Well, do we have the skills to evaluate what is retrieved and pass that information on to our students? I don't know.

Do we? I'm just a knowledgeable patron, not a librarian. Do you? As Greenhill notes, "looking for the .edu suffix" doesn't help much, since scholars (and students!) are as likely to build bogus sites as anybody else. As for citation as evidence of authoritativeness—well, that's Google Page Rank (or part of it), and a lot of nonsense winds up high in results pages.

The post discusses traditional guidelines for evaluating resources—guidelines that, as Greenhill notes, require the kind of knowledge people *learn* in universities (if they're lucky), not skills they have when they arrive. Consider the list:

> Where does the work sit in relation to the body of literature in the discipline? Is the publishing body a reliable source? Does it have a biased point of view? Does it have the depth of research that makes it valuable? Is the research design sound?

Where would we start? (Well, *we* wouldn't, since based on those criteria, everything in *C&I* is worthless.)

> What I have a hard time imagining is *how* to design a series of information literacy classes to bridge the gap between uncritically using Google and a thorough intellectual assessment of scholarly resources. How do we break it into small, engaging components that build on each other to give those critical thinking skills? It is much easier to teach students the mechanics of searching, of discovery.

Is this—*should this be*—part of the philosophical basis for libraries of all sorts? Possibly so. How would you go about it effectively? It's not really a new problem: "Bad" resources predate the internet and continue alongside it. On the other hand, which publishing bodies do *you* consider reliable sources *per se*? Name a Big Publisher that hasn't published at least one demonstrably nonsensical or worthless item in the past decade. (Name a journal that's never published an article that was later rescinded or represented hidden research bias.)

Is Lifelong Learning an Academic Library Core Value?

Marc Meola asks that question in a November 12, 2008 post on *ACRLog*. I'd equate "core values" with "philosophy," so it's relevant to this overall topic. Meola has a nicely lighthearted view of "core values" as a schtick:

> Articulating "core values" has been touted by many conference speakers as a magic bedrocky goodness that will shield us from all sorts of scary nasty change that is getting up and roiling all our stuff.
>
> One problem is you have to figure out what your core values are.

Meola's own library is doing strategic planning, which *of course* includes determining core values—and they got to "lifelong learning."

> Who could be against lifelong learning you say? I'm not against it at all, but is it really a **core** academic library value? Is a list of core values a laundry list of all the things you are for and want to promote and encourage? Is it really one of our core values to provide services to our students and other adults throughout their entire lives?

Meola's not convinced: "I'd argue that our core values strictly speaking have more to do with meeting the information needs that arise from the current classes at our institution. If some lifelong learning needs get met because of that, fantastic!, but let's not overreach and call it a core value." Colleagues disagreed and talked about promoting the "disposition to engage in lifelong learning." I'm with Meola in this case: "I'm not really so sure what that means either."

As should be obvious to longtime readers, I'm a paradox: My professional career (my "day job") primarily supported academic libraries—but my heart's always been with public libraries. Of many partly-correct slogans used by public libraries, "The People's University" has been one I like—which would make *public* libraries the key supporters of lifelong learning. I'd argue that lifelong learning (broadly defined to include all aspects of personal growth and enlightenment) *is* a core value for public libraries. For academic libraries? I'm not so sure. Meola concludes:

> The world would be a better place if there were more lifelong learners and if they had easy access to high quality information. What role should academic libraries play in bringing about such a world?

One role: Support public libraries—and, as academic librarians, refrain from treating public libra-

ries and librarians as inferior or unimportant. Another: Push for open access.

There were 16 comments. I was immediately taken with the first sentences of the first comment, from Steven Bell:

> You raise a good question. What are the core values of an academic library? My immediate thought is that there may not be a common set.

That begins a fairly long comment—but suggesting that universality is unlikely is, to me, a great starting point. Barbara Fister's up next, drawing a useful distinction between *providing services* throughout students' lives ("I think trying to be our students only library for life is a terrible idea") and *preparing* students to be inquiring adults who can use other resources well—to be "information literate." Her example, in another field, is excellent:

> We don't continue to mark up student's writing for them or give them access to writing tutors after they graduate, but we don't assume that when we work on making them better writers, it's only relevant while they're in college.

Marilyn R. Pukkila suggests "*educating* library users for lifelong learning"—and that *may* be a core value for most libraries, academic and otherwise.

Libraries are Miscellaneous

So says Ryan Deschamps in a November 12, 2009 post at *The Other Librarian*. He noted a string of stuff going on in the field and thought about "the ongoing identity crisis of libraries and librarians and what we can do about it. To resolve an identity crisis, we must start with 'what is it that libraries are for?'

Deschamps doesn't simply give us The List; he understands how The List works:

> This question will inevitably lead to a wide range of self-assured, but diverse, answers followed by a smaller range of more complex and uncertain opinions on the purpose of libraries and librarians. Clarity on this topic is also not helped by the diverse types of libraries (Academic, Public, AskPro—I mean Special libraries and so on).

And follows that with three "self-assured responses" and five other possibilities. Herewith, Deschamps' three (with paraphrases of his comments):

➢ **Libraries are for the lending of books**. That's how they started and it continues to be a key service—but *librarians* (those holding Masters' degrees) are increasingly removed from circulation as an activity.

➢ **Libraries are for educating people of all ages**. Explicit for most academic and school libraries and for *some* public libraries. "While the educational role for libraries is strong, it is not perfect. For instance, many assume 'education' to be analogous with 'courses' which, while many libraries do offer courses of all types, this activity is not particularly core to what libraries actually do."

➢ **Libraries are for preserving and/or promoting community culture**. Sometimes explicit in governance—but "the cultural role for libraries is also fraught with problems because it pits them into competition with museums, symphonies, archives… The cultural role for libraries is largely a supportive one at best and does not speak to the value a library has in the community."

But wait! Here are five more—ones Deschamps offers as "purposes that can equally be championed" but without discussion:

1. Championing information rights including the avoidance of censorship

2. Introducing the public to new and emerging forms of information formats, including the Internet, Social Media and Gaming.

3. Promoting the economic development of a community by encouraging innovation and providing key services to tourists, immigrants and new residents.

4. Fostering a love of reading and learning, particularly in children.

5. Being the public place for the community, where people can interact, socialize and be visible.

So which is it—or what are they? Here, I think, Deschamps gets it *exactly* right, so much so that I'm quoting two paragraphs without comment:

> My personal view is that the identities of libraries are so tied to their communities that there is no end of roles for them. That's why I titled this post 'Libraries are Miscellaneous.' The reality is that the purpose of a library depends heavily on the culture, location and structure of its community. That's why I really enjoy and press the 'Community Relations' role it can play. Libraries, especially public libraries, are extremely adaptive to community needs and can play the role of 'catch all' where other institutions such as hospitals, universities and schools really struggle to play such a role.

> The risk, in my view, is that we pay too much attention to what other libraries are doing and immediately follow suit because 'that's what a library

is for.' Or, perhaps worse, we fail to do something completely different from other libraries because there are no library pioneers to look to for guidance. We cannot do everything that every library is doing–and we should not feel 'behind' because we fail to do every latest cool thing. Ethically, we should be very conscious of the 'crowding out' theory as well—we simply should not compete—to an unfair advantage—with services already available in the community.

Each library is different from every other library and those differences should be tied to the library's community. Read the first sentence in that second paragraph again. Ring any bells?

Deschamps offers this four-point list: Libraries...

...look at their communities to determine needs

...apply encouragement and leadership to the community to see if they can meet their own needs

...point to and promote community assets (including books, meeting rooms etc.) when they can be helpful

...continue to be growing organisms ala Ranganathan.

A strong discussion.

5 *Universal Truths That All Librarians Can Agree Upon Right Now*

Did "Andy" have tongue in cheek when writing that ambitious title on a January 3, 2010 post at *Agnostic, Maybe*? That's not at all clear. He introduces the list by claiming that these "current universal truths" will "be the basis for any discussion about the library in the future decade."

The five "universal truths" with paraphrases or quoted excerpts from Andy's expansions:

➢ **Perception of information is changing**. "Information is now an instant gratification commodity, capable of being gained through a multitude of means (especially computer based). For libraries, this requires us to be flexible with our interfaces..."

➢ **Literacy is changing**. "What it means to be literate twenty years ago is but a part of the greater definition now. The ability to read and write information on computers now shares with its print brethren..."

➢ **Libraries are now part of greater information chorus**. Two parts: the "plethora of non-library internet based websites [with good information] and the "explosion of user generated content."

➢ **Communication is our friend**. This has to do with new ways to connect with "customers" but also the need to make catalogs, etc., more available.

➢ **The underlying philosophies of the library have not changed**. "As much as the information revolution has swept through the profession, the commitment to academic freedom, intellectual inquiry, and act as a community resource (whether you are serving the public, a school, or a company; a space for all, if you will) are still intact..."

Well...maybe. It has *never* been the case that libraries were the only sources of good information, so #3 really isn't new. Since I regard "information" as an essentially empty word, particularly in the "commodity" sense, I won't comment on #1.

Does every library person agree with these five "universal truths"? I doubt it. Will they be the "basis for any discussion about the library"? Highly unlikely. I'd like to think that #5 is true, and the list as a whole is interesting if perhaps not wholly convincing.

But it's also one librarian's ambitious statement—as opposed to Big Deal Statements such as the two discussed in the next section.

Taiga and Darien, Darien and Taiga

There's something about Statements. People *love* to make them, people *love* to high-five or fisk them, people *love* to believe they'll resonate throughout a field—and frequently people forget about them after a week, a month, rarely longer.

In the first few months of 2009, two Statements emerged from very different parts of the library field—close enough together that some commentators discussed both of them in single commentaries. Both emerged from closed settings—one from an invitation-only conference, one from a very small "summit." Will either have any lasting effect on libraries? I can't make that call. I can say that both were hot stuff for a few weeks, then (as far as I can tell) dropped off the radar entirely. This section is partly about the two Statements, partly about the dynamics of Statements and reactions.

The Taiga Forum and the Original Provocative Statements

What on earth is the Taiga Forum? According to the website (taigaforum.org), it's "A community of

AULs and ADs, Challenging the traditional boundaries in libraries." It's an invitation-only group, but any AUL or AD can request an invitation. "AUL" is clearly an academic library title—and my impression is that "AD" here *also* means assistant director of an academic library, not a public library. Certainly every name on the website is associated with a university library. The group holds an invitational conference "usually around ALA Midwinter"—the first was in 2006, the most recent in 2010, always in the same city as Midwinter.

Here's the Purpose statement:

> Advances in information technology demand that AULs and Assistant Directors develop new solutions, evolve to meet changing user expectations, and prepare leaders for the future. Whether we are in technical services, public services, collection development, or information technology, we must develop cross-functional vision that makes internal organizational structures more flexible, agile, and effective. We must move beyond the borders and transcend the traditional library organization. Taiga is the land between the tundra and deciduous forests and grasslands. Taiga is about change, a place of shifting boundaries.

The first Taiga conference yielded a set of "fifteen provocative statements," all prefaced by "Within the next five years..."—and according to the website, these statements were "disseminated throughout the industry" and "stimulated meaningful dialogues in scores of organizations and energized the strategic planning process for many." We're now within 11 months of the "five year" target, so it's not unseemly to see how these provocations have worked out. In some cases, I'm only including a portion of the provocation.

> 1. traditional library organizational structures will no longer be functional. Reference and catalog librarians as we know them today will no longer exist. Technical services and public services will have merged into a new group called "consulting [something]". Public services and instructional technology, wherever it exists, will have merged or will no longer exist.

Really? In every academic library? By 2011?

> 2. libraries will have reduced the physical footprint of the physical collection within the library proper by at least 50 percent.

I'm *certain* that's wrong as a generalization.

> 3. There will no longer be reference desks or reference offices in the library. Instead, public services staff offices will be located outside the physical li-

brary. Metasearching will render reference librarians obsolete.

The Taiga folk seem to have a real thing about reference librarians.

> 4. all information discovery will begin at Google, including discovery of library resources. The continuing disaggregation of content from its original container will cause a revolution in resource discovery.

Note that "**all**"—a common thread here. When did your academic library close its online catalog, since **all** discovery is on Google?

> 5. a large number of libraries will no longer have local OPACs. Instead, we will have entered a new age of data consolidation (either shared catalogs or catalogs that are integrated into discovery tools), both of our catalogs and our collections. The ERM system and the ILS will be one and discovery will be outsourced.

This one might be right, depending on your definition of "large number."

> 6. there will no longer be a monolithic library Web site. Instead, library data will be pushed out to many starting places on the Web and directly to users.

I'll assert that the second sentence may be *partly* right, but the first is wrong—and, after all, why should the two be contradictory? That's "Or thinking" and you'd expect these folks to be well past such disjunctions.

> 7. academic computing and libraries will have merged. The library will be a partner in the Learning and Research Support Services Infrastructure. Its value will depend on its ability to reallocate resources to new curation, workflow, and resource specialization services.

That merger happened at some institutions decades ago. I'll guess (heck, I'll *assert*) that it hasn't happened at most institutions—and won't within the next year. The dismissal of existing library values is startling, though—read that last sentence carefully. Ah, but the startling stuff is just beginning...

> 8. there will be no more librarians as we know them. Staff may have MBAs or be computer/data scientists. All library staff will need the technical skills equivalent to today's systems and web services personnel. The ever-increasing technology curve will precipitate a high turnover among traditional librarians; the average age of library staff will have dropped to 28.

This is why there's such a shortage of librarians and why graduates from LIS are in such incredible demand, right? Right?

9. publishers and intermediaries will have changed dramatically. Many small and scholarly publishers will fold. Subscription agents and book vendors will have new business models. Dissemination of non-STM serials and books will no longer be commercially viable.

Now, maybe there's a missing qualifier in that last sentence, but as it stands it's so bizarre as to be laughable. Even in 2006, how could anyone have predicted that *all* "non-STM serial and book" publishing would disappear or become unviable by January 2011? These days, there's some evidence that small publishers (not necessarily small *scholarly* publishers) may be the salvation of the book industry...and both non-STM books and non-STM serials are still fields with revenues in the tens of billions of dollars.

10. e-books and e-book readers will be ubiquitous. Standards will have magically made this possible. Hand helds will be ubiquitous and library resources will need to be accessible to these devices to meet user needs.

Standards don't work magic; by now (and even by 2006), you'd expect people to understand that. I can think of no definition of "ubiquitous" that will fit even the most optimistic installed base of ebook readers, or sales of ebooks, by January 2011.

I'm going to stop there, partly because it's more difficult to judge the track record for the other five statements—and partly because this commentary is supposed to be about the *new* Taiga statements. Still, I believe it's instructive to look back, although I know you're *never* supposed to look back at the predictions of a few years ago: That's bad form.

Before proceeding to Taiga 4, the second set of statements, I think it's useful to quote Steven Bell—who wasn't in the Taiga Forum in 2006 but now is. He says, in the course of a commentary, "Even looking back to 2006 it's highly unlikely any academic librarians believed we'd all be gone by 2011."

If that's true, then we have the remarkable case of a group sending out a set of statements, *without context or clarification*, that includes statements *none of them believes*! Honestly, I don't know what to say about that...but here's what some others have to say about the newer set of statements.

Taiga 4

Once again, last year's statements—issued after the meeting—are prefaced by "Within the next 5 years..." This time, there are ten, not 15—and one of them is an oddity: the whole paragraph appears ~~in strikeout mode~~.

Are the new ones better? This time, I'll give them in full, since they're numbered and provide a basis for the discussions that follow, and I'll avoid my own snark until the end of the statements. The statements are, to be sure, copyright by the Taiga Forum.

1. ... all librarians will be expected to take personal responsibility for their own professional development; each of us will evolve or die. Budget pressures will force administrators to confront the "psychological shadow" cast by tenure and pseudo-tenure that has inhibited them from performing meaningful evaluations and taking necessary personnel actions. Librarians who do not produce will be reassigned or fired.

2. ... collection development as we now know it will cease to exist as selection of library materials will be entirely patron-initiated. Ownership of materials will be limited to what is actively used. The only collection development activities involving librarians will be competition over special collections and archives.

3. ~~... Google will meet virtually all information needs for both students and researchers. Publishers will use Google as a portal to an increasing array of content and services that disintermediate libraries. All bibliographic data, excepting what libraries create for local special collections, will be produced and consumed at the network level.~~

4. ... knowledge management will be identified as a critical need on campus and will be defined much more broadly than libraries have defined it. The front door for all information inquiries will be at the university level. Libraries will have a small information service role.

5. ... libraries will have given up on the "outreach librarian" model after faculty persistently show no interest in it. Successful libraries will have identified shared goals with teaching faculty and adapted themselves to work at the intersection of librarianship, information technology and instructional technology.

6. ... libraries will provide no in-person services. All services (reference, circulation, instruction, etc.) will be unmediated and supported by technology.

7. ... libraries will have abandoned the hybrid model to focus exclusively on electronic collections, with limited investments in managing shared print archives. Local unique collections will be funded only by donor contributions.

8. … library buildings will no longer house collections and will become campus community centers that function as part of the student services sector. Campus business offices will manage license and acquisition of digital content. These changes will lead campus administrators to align libraries with the administrative rather than the academic side of the organization.

9. … the library community will insist on a better return on investment for membership organizations (e.g., CRL, DLF, CNI, SPARC, ARL, ALA). All collaboration of significance will be centered around either individual entrepreneurial libraries (e.g., HathiTrust, OLE), or regional consortia.

10. … 20% of the ARL library directors will have retired. University administrators will see that librarians do not have the skills they need and will hire leaders from other parts of the academy, leading both to a realignment of the library within the university and to the decline of the library profession.

An outside observer could look at this list and suggest a group filled with self-loathing (#10), a hatred for traditional books and services (#6, #7, #8), a dislike of national organizations (such as the Taiga Forum?) (#9) and more. An outside observer might also wonder whether all of this is guaranteed not only for academic libraries but for *all* libraries, since there's no qualification offered. And an observer who views university libraries (particularly ARL libraries) as, among other things, great storehouses of the record of our civilization might shake their head and wonder at the willful abnegation of that role. And all by January 2014!

Ah, but just what is the purpose of the Provocative Statements? Are they actually predictions—or are they nightmare scenarios, warnings of what *could* happen if current trends continue? That's not clear. The statements themselves offer no guidance and the website doesn't help at all.

So we turn to reactions from those who read them or might have helped draft them. Most of the commenters are a lot closer to today's academic libraries than I am—and for the sake of sanity, I *will* assume that the Taiga folk either don't care about public libraries or simply omitted "academic" when talking about libraries.

Taiga4: This Time It's Personal
This one's narrow—from "Karen" on March 5, 2009 at *Re:Generations* (www.cla.ca/divisions/cacul/regenerations/). She focuses on #5 and responds, in part:

Huh.

Maybe I don't know what the "outreach librarian" model really is—isn't it all about identifying shared goals with teaching faculty? Doesn't it already involve work at the margins of librarianship, instruction, and technology? Insofar as I do outreach work (and I do plenty, although I wish I could do more) this is exactly what I'm doing.

Lately I've been thinking about the work that I do outside of my office—the opportunities I find, seize, or make to get into the classrooms... I serve. It's been unusually clear to me lately that being in these places is essential to doing my job. This is because students and faculty are human beings. Human beings aren't always efficient and organized, and they're usually busy and harried, and (this is crucial) they pay most attention to what's right in front of their face. I know this because I'm a human being too....

It's a tricky balancing act for any academic librarian with a lot of hats to wear. In my case I'm a middle manager as well as a librarian, and there's a lot of office work to keep me in my chair. But I'm also convinced that if I don't unglue myself and go to the students' presentations and the guest lectures and events, the faculty will never know who I am, and all my office work will be for naught. They won't assign research, they won't send their students to the library, and we'll be looking some of those tougher Provocative Statements right in the eye.

So I'm not giving up on the "outreach librarian" model, at least not as I define it. As far as I can tell it's critical to our success in libraries, and on campuses. As E.M. Forster might say, "Only connect..."

No additional comment necessary. Karen's at McMaster; she's not giving up on outreach work, and I'd guess she has a long-term commitment.

Roy Tennant comments
Tennant blogged about the Taiga4 statements on March 12, 2009 in his LJ blog. He quoted the statements in full, adding his own comments in bracketed italics. Some of what Tennant has to say, with my comments on *his* comments unindented when they appear.:

1. Since when has the first line not been true? Did I miss something? As for the last line, only unions leaving the field will allow that to happen. You won't find me holding my breath on that one.

2. I really don't see this as an either/or equation. No doubt we need to make it easier for our users to engage in identifying what they want us to collect, but I don't see collection development activities disappearing anytime soon. Call me old-fashioned.

Here, Tennant shows a proclivity for "And thinking" rather than "Or thinking." As you can proba-

bly guess, I agree (and I'd guess Roy now sees a place for MARC *and* other metadata formats, moving past "MARC must die").

> 3. Yeah, and all copyright law will be repealed as well. Without that, the only way our users will be able to get to the content they discover via Google will be through us. Or maybe Google will just buy up all the publishers and be done with it.

I'm still bemused by #3 appearing with strikethrough—as though Taiga wanted to make the statement and immediately disassociate itself from the statement.

Re #4, Tennant just says "Huh?"—which, frankly, is roughly my reaction. As for #5, however—noting Karen's commentary—"I have to agree fairly strongly on this one." For #6, he says "If this ever becomes true it won't be for some time to come." He chooses not to say anything about #7 or #8.

> 9. this is already happening, and the economic downturn only makes this more likely to continue.
>
> 10. Hey, now you're just depressing me. Except for that 20% of the ARL directors retiring bit.

Tennant's closing note:

> A few are happening now to one degree or another, others may become apparent over the next decade, and others may never happen. But they are definitely provocative in places. Debate among yourselves, then comment below.

There are a total of three, count them, *three* comments—and the third doesn't show up until August 2009. In the first, Steven Bell—who did the "lightning talk" for #5—adds a note: "I did emphasize the importance of the blended role and focusing on shared goals." The second, from "Skeptic," is terse: "If #s 7& 8 ever come true, they won't do so within 5 years." I'm on Skeptic's side here, which shouldn't be surprising. Finally, "steve" commented on #1:

> I had to laugh at #1. This is typical AD/AUL fantasizing about how cool it would be just fire people who express skepticism with the bold initiative du jour. Don't like our plan to replace cataloging with social tagging? Clean out your desk and hit the road, loser!
>
> The slightly threatening tone is also amusing. I'd love to see an library AD appear before a university's faculty senate and explain why tenure should be eliminated because his pals at the Taiga Forum said so.

I've always assumed Tennant's blog has a huge readership, which makes the paucity of comments

somewhat surprising. (OK, so he's on the world's worst blogging system, particularly for commenting, but that doesn't seem to stop the venomous hordes who follow the Annoyed Librarian.)

Provocative stuff about future of libraries
This one's from Chris Bourg, AUL for Public Services (a position that no longer exists, according to the original Taiga statements) at Stanford, posting on March 13, 2009 at *Feral Librarian*. Bourg comments on two statements—#2 and #6.

> 2. I mostly agree with this, and think it is a good thing. I think almost all collection of regular materials can be done with approval plans. If the approval plan misses something, we buy it at patrons' request. Selecting and curating as we know it is a dubious luxury of the past.
>
> 6. FAIL. Every survey, interview, focus group we have done shows an overwhelming preference for in-person help at time of need. Humans are social animals, and information technology doesn't change that. There is a reason most of us decide to "Press 0 to speak to an agent"! The challenge is to figure out what kinds of services are best provided in an unmediated environment, and which are best provided in-person. And then figure out how to provide resources for both.

It's interesting to see a public-services AUL ready to dispense with collection development (including curating, something you'd expect ARL-level libraries to care a *lot* about); it may be less interesting to see a strong defense of...well, public services. There have been no direct comments on this post.

Academic Librarians Are Not Salespeople—But They Should Be
If that post title seems somehow irrelevant to the Taiga discussion, it's because it is—Steven Bell's on about something else in this March 24, 2009 post at *ACRLog*—but he does discuss the Targa provocations and the relative *lack* of discussion.

> Keep in mind that all those statements are prefaced with "within the next 5 years". Even looking back to 2006 it's highly unlikely any academic librarians believed we'd all be gone by 2011. But the value of Taiga's provocative statements isn't their predictive value. Rather it's in their ability to get librarians thinking about and discussing how it is possible we can even be making such suggestions, and what it is we need to do to shape our own preferred future rather than submit to the outcomes the statements suggest. I can recall several regional conferences that based some sort of activity or discussion on the 2006 statements. I doubt that

will repeat for the 2009 statements. I'm not sure why. The 2009 statements are worthy of discussion, but perhaps in our current state of financial crisis academic librarians are simply fixated with budgetary issues.

Now, see, that's interesting: Bell is saying that Taiga Forum members were stating something *that none of them believed*. Given the *total* lack of context for the statements, how does anyone else deal with that sort of document?

After discussing the need for librarians to be good salespeople Bell asks people to share their thoughts. Sixteen did, including pingbacks. A couple of those reactions are worth noting:

➢ **Rudy Leon** (noting that some discussion took place on the FriendFeed LSW room): "I've also been surprised at the lack of conversation about them. Perhaps it's because no one really knows what their purpose is? Are they supposed to irritate us, enrage us, or move us in their direction? I don't know how to take them, so it's hard to do more than shrug and think bad thoughts about them in general." Do note "think *bad* thoughts"—an interesting choice of words.

➢ **Barbara Fister:** "I had Rudy's reaction – what is this about? Because they seemed to be totally a recipe for How to Spoil Libraries and Insult Everyone Who Loves Them... If I showed those to students and faculty they wouldn't know whether to be amused or horrified, but would probably conclude it was some kind of hoax."

➢ "**Iburn**": "'Provocative' doesn't necessarily mean it provokes thought. Sensationalistic is more apt here; drawing attention to where little is due."

Some provocative statements

John Dupuis weighed in on April 1, 2009 at *Confessions of a Science Librarian*. He finds himself in the "not-so-impressed pile" and comments (in part):

For the most part, their statements seem meant almost not to be taken seriously. They are pokes-in-the-eye. Unsupported and unsupportable...and yet, I've done a lot of the same things in my own ten years series, I've even said some of the same things (of course, a few years earlier). So the idea that you can be provocative and a little far out shouldn't bother me, right?

What bothers me is the tone. It's destructive and negative rather than cautionary or even visionary.

It's "look at me, look at what a guru I am" In fact it's part of a strain we see these days of people trying to out-"apocalyptic guru" each other. One person says, "newspapers and old media are dead" and the next says, "I think newspapers and old media are deader than you think they are!" "No, I think they're deader!" "No, I do!" And so on.

So, "Libraries must change!" and "No, I think libraries must change more than you do!" The Chicken Little impulse is natural, but not constructive...

Dupuis offers his own list of 10 "ridiculous, unsupportable, poke-in-the-eye provocative statements"—in this case, about the Taiga Forum and its statements. I'll refer you to the original post; it's both amusing and, I'm afraid, a little too much on the money.

Then Dupuis does something on the ten statements that Dorothea Salo later categorized as fisking, and I think she's right—his comments are consistently longer than the statements they comment on. Some of those comments (collapsing paragraphs and leaving out leading ellipses):

1. In my opinion, any organization that refuses to play any role in supporting the professional and career development of its staff is a bad organization. Any organization, especially one with an academic mission, that behaves like this isn't "provocative." It's dysfunctional. Why so confrontational? Should we expect better? Shouldn't anyone who works in a knowledge industry expect better? Who do these people take their management lessons from? Donald Trump? Yes, libraries have personnel issues, tenure can be a problem, transitioning people to new skill sets and career paths is a challenge. Yes, it's called leadership...

2. Just-in-time collection development versus just-in-case. Haven't we been discussing this for years? In a nearly 100% online collection environment, it's entirely possible that we won't actually own anything, but will only access things on a pay-per-use basis, especially for new e-only monographs. On the other hand, it's hard to imagine all the commercial journal publishers disappearing in five years and that a pay-per-use model for all that content makes any sense for us or them. On the third hand, as we see progress towards an Open Access paradigm, it's hard to see how this point is relevant to that material at all, or that they even considered libraries' role in curating, organizing and managing those scholarly resources at all. And I guess they've completely written off IRs...

3. In the PDF version of the document, this provocative statement is actually crossed out, as if they changed their minds and no longer thought

this was a provocative statement. Oddly, I actually think this provocative statement is the best of the lot. It implies a very large question: What do we think is worth paying for?...

4. Frankly, I can never get myself to finish reading a sentence that has the term "knowledge management" in it. I'm not sure what's provocative about this one. Are there any libraries that are currently the knowledge management hub of their campuses, meeting all possible information needs? Is this a role that makes sense in the future?...

5. The point seems to be that faculty are nowhere near as interested in us as we are in them. This always has been and always will be true... If faculty show no interest in "outreach", what makes them think that faculty will show any interest in identifying "shared goals" and working with us at the "intersection of librarianship, information technology and instructional technology"?...

6. Yes, this one is genuinely provocative. It's interesting that this sort of assumes that libraries will have no role on campus in providing study, collaborative or casual spaces. And that all the successful Learning Commons projects will just fold up and disappear and no new ones will be initiated. If students are in our physical spaces, they may actually want to talk to somebody about something at some point. I can kind of see myself (after all, I'll only be 51 in five years), running away from students in the library so that I'm not tempted to perform some service for them unmediated by technology. It also assumes that pretty well all aspects higher education will be mediated by technology. Which is possible but hardly likely in five years. And I assume that Information Literacy will also disappear, as I will begin running away from profs and ignoring their emails just in case they want me to do some unmediated instruction or consultation with their students.

7. The idea that libraries will abandon print completely one day has been around for awhile, particularly in the science library community. Will most or all libraries completely abandon print as soon as five years? Probably not. Probably not even ten years, although by then we might only be spending one percent or less of our budgets on print. However, the idea that local unique collections would only be funded by donor contributions is absurd, destructive and actually kind of misses the point. If newspapers can find part of their survival strategy in aligning themselves to their communities with an intensely local focus, then so should academic libraries. It seems to me that local unique collections can provide something that Google can't and that intensely local focus might

be something that we do think is actually worth spending money on. And yes, I'm sure we'll digitize our intensely local print collections.

Do remember that Dupuis is a science librarian. Does he believe *general* academic library collections would (or should) be spending "one percent or less of our budgets" on print? Possibly, but it seems unlikely.

8. I would suggest that what they're talking about is also no longer a library, so I guess I'm not working there anymore anyways. Which leads to understanding #s 1, 2, 5 and 7. Wal-Martization is the term we're looking for, the race to the bottom hollowing out the mission of all of higher education. In fact, I think it's possible to see this as the uber-provocative statement, the one from which all the others follow. The loss of the academic library's academic mission leads to treating our staff like Wal-Mart treats theirs and to viewing our licensed and purchased content like Wal-Mart views the products they stock. Which makes it odd to put at #8. It probably should have been #1. And I surely can't imagine that this would be anyone's preferred outcome.

9. This one's fine, although I'm not sure why they would have considered it even mildly controversial rather than full-blown provocative. Using the word "all" rather than "most" or "much of" does seem rather strong, but again not provocative.

I'll make a flat-out prediction at this point. ALA will not have disappeared by 2014, and ACRL—which is, after all, academic librarians—will be at least half as large as it is today. Nor will ARL have dissolved. DLF's already been absorbed into another organization...and, by the way, three regional consortia have now merged into a super-consortium (my employer, LYRASIS). On the other hand, it's hard to argue with Dupuis' second sentence.

10. Since these statements are coming from AULs & ADs, I find it odd that they don't seem to think that they are qualified to make the next step and become directors. Or that anyone on their campuses will think that they are. Although the skills that librarians do have are probably not best suited for running what's left of the library the in the student centre model anyways, so maybe it's just as well.

I can't resist the temptation to quote the next three paragraphs in full (yes, the blog has a CC BY-NC license—would John Dupuis do otherwise?)

It's interesting. The sum total of the provocative statements seems to be that we'll all be spending our time serving coffee to students in the next five

years as pretty well every other library function will either completely disappear or be taken over by someone else. It seems that they're despairing that we'll lose virtually any sort of genuine, meaningful, professional role that libraries or librarians can have in the academic mission of the university.

Now, what they provocatively suggest may come true. The Provocateurs may even think it's inevitable or desirable, although I hope not. I do think that it would have been possible to have worded most of their statements differently, in a way that suggests a way forward. I don't think it's useful to approach the future from such a defeatist perspective, that some of their provocative statements could actually show some, you know, that thing we expect of library leaders like AULs and ADs. Oh yeah, leadership.

I also find it interesting how much contempt and disdain for their fellow library workers oozes out of the various "provocative statements."

That last paragraph has colored my opinions of both sets of statements from the get-go—and, to be sure, *I'm not even a library worker*. But let's close with the final paragraph in the 2,500-word post, a paragraph that refers to the post itself:

(Also, it may very well be no coincidence that it's published on April 1.)

This fisking is probably the most comprehensive takedown of Taiga you're likely to see. There are 13 comments (including Dupuis' own responses), some of which refer to another set of Statement-like utterances that I'm deliberately not discussing. A few of them:

➢ **Mita**: "My initial reaction was 'Oh—you folks write down ten sentences and then sit back and expect everyone else to do the heavy work in refuting it. That's hardly fair.'"

➢ **Steven Bell**: "Ok John, you gave us some of the feedback we were looking for. When the folks who put these statements together do so, there's no way of knowing how people will react. It resonates with some. Others have a pretty negative reaction. You have to be open to any possibility. Not even everyone involved agrees whether they are provocative or not. But the spirit is to question what's ahead, and to offer something that creates some conversation about the possibilities. Clearly, in your opinion, the statements don't live up to the expectations of the audience. What I find a bit disturbing though is that the commentary is as much an attack on the

people as the ideas. I'm not sure where the 'let's take these self-important bastards down a notch' attitude in your post and the comments is coming from. You and others may think that's deserved. Knowing the folks who work on this and what they're trying to accomplish, I have to disagree...."

I find this particularly interesting, given Bell's previous statements lamenting librarians' unwillingness to disagree about things. Here's Dupuis, disagreeing vigorously and seeing a tone in the statements that I, for one, find virtually impossible to ignore—and here's Bell, objecting to Dupuis for doing so. Or are some disagreements more privileged than others? Dupuis responded (in part, and collapsing paragraphs):

My tone is harsh, yes, but frankly that's the reaction I had. So on that level your provocation was very successful. My tone is also derisive and that's probably not completely called for but again, the tone of the statements was also scathing and derisive of libraries and librarians. As for "let's take these self-important bastards down a notch," I'll cop to that. It's not pretty but it's honest and I apologize if I crossed the line. However, the statements aren't pretty either but they are your group's honest expression. As for whether the takedown is deserved, well, I quote the statements: "Librarians who do not produce will be reassigned or fired." "The only collection development activities involving librarians will be competition over special collections and archives." "University administrators will see that librarians do not have the skills they need" To that I'll add, if you can't stand the heat, stay out of the kitchen... Suggestions for next time? Try something a little more open and a little more broadly based. Provoke to inspire change, not despair.

That last sentence may sum it up. (I should note that Dupuis and Bell both agreed that things needed to start over afresh, and looked forward to a conversation over a beer. Since I've had conversations with both of them—separately—in appropriately casual settings, I can say that's not a bad idea.)

There are more comments—including one from an anonymous former AD who says "Library administrators really DO fantasize about how awesome it would be if they could just fire people and ignore all that pesky tenure stuff. Any administrator who says otherwise is lying."

What becomes clear by this point is that the unadorned set of statements does not *at all* do

what the Taiga Forum might have intended. Is it "worst case scenarios—a future that could be but that we certainly want to avoid," as Bell says in another comment? Perhaps, but there's simply no way to gather that from the statements and (lack of) supporting material.

I've been provoked!

That's Meredith Farkas, writing on April 2, 2009 at *Information Wants To Be Free*. She begins by offering her reaction to the statements themselves: "*YAWN.*"

> Seriously, I found a lot more to like about John Dupuis' criticisms of the Taiga Forum Provocative Statements than about the statements themselves. I'm just not sure what the rest of the profession is supposed to do with these statements — I don't know what they're supposed to provoke. Some are really doomy-and-gloomy, others are needlessly vague, and few seem structured to provoke positive action or change.

So, for example, she looks at #10 and wonders:

> What are the skills librarians don't have that they should? And what can we do about it? Nothing I guess, since it's the people who are second in line (who apparently don't have the skills to run the library of the future) who are making these pronouncements. Personally, I see a lot of tremendously flexible, passionate, visionary librarians in this profession who are more than capable of leading libraries into a bright future—Jenica Rogers-Urbanek is a great example of such a leader (congrats on the new job, Jenica!!).

Having used some of Jenica Rogers' writing for the Library Leadership Network and chatted with Jenica, I have to second Meredith in finding her to be one prime example of why #10 is, or at least should be, wrong.

> Farkas also focuses on #5:

> Like John, "identifying shared goals with teaching faculty" seems to me what outreach is all about, at least at my small, non-ARL University. How else do we work with faculty to identify shared goals if not through outreach? I must not understand what the word means. But I certainly do agree that we're much more interested in faculty than they are in us, and that it's critical that we align our activities with their goals than to push our own agenda as if it exists apart from supporting their teaching and research. But really, is that a provocative statement or an obvious one?

She concludes: "All these statements provoke in me is a sense that AUL's and AD's in ARLs are living in a world that's a million miles away from my small academic library." (I wasn't aware that Taiga is limited to ARL institutions—but the point's still well taken.)

> Has anyone else commented on the irony of their tagline (A community of AUL's and AD's challenging the traditional boundaries in libraries)? And they challenge those "traditional boundaries" by being an invitation-only organization that only invites AUL's and AD's from ARL libraries (wow! that's a lot of acronyms). And then, at their invitation-only event, they have their closed discussions and tell the rest of us what libraries are going to be like within five years. Still feels pretty darn elitist to me, especially since they publish their statements as a PDF which allows for no dialogue on their site with others.

Farkas got 12 responses—some of them particularly interesting. Pete (a UK academic librarian) called the statements "a big shovel for people too willing to dig their own graves." Jenica Rogers—an academic library director, but *not* at the ARL level—finds the statements "immensely irritating, because I don't find them thoughtful. And so, if by provocative, they meant 'irritating,' then they're doing great. If they meant, 'likely to spark meaningful conversation about the ideas held therein,' I'm not impressed." A "Midwest Librarian" called this "Another case of the big research librarian administrators having their own little clique and then proclaiming that what they think should apply to everyone in academic libraryland." And Bell, once again, says he's for reactions of any type but wants to "separate out the ideas from the people who write them"—which is really hard to do. Bell suggests "folks talk to an AUL or an AD about the statements..."—but there's no membership list at Taiga, no indication of *which* AULs or Ads are included. He calls for people to be open-minded about a surprisingly secretive organization; that's a tough call.

Allaying fear

Dorothea Salo commented on *both* sets of Taiga statements (and on Dupuis' fisking) in this April 3, 2009 post at *Caveat Lector*. Portions:

> Make no mistake, I'm on John's side in this one... but I also think it's worth taking a momentary step back to examine the mindset that produced those statements.

> It is, I think, a very different mindset from the one that produced the first set of provocative statements, which I would characterize with the word "challenge."

This set? This set I would characterize with "fear." Our seconds-in-command are scared out of their ever-lovin' *minds*. Whether we agree with that fear, whether we agree with their response to it, whether we agree with the manner in which it was aggregated and expressed—all by itself, that fear is worth considering and responding to, especially for those of us in ARL libraries. *These are our leaders* talking, people. That means we need to step up and find them a way out of the scary place, *for our own sakes* if for no other reason.

Salo worries about deadwood in the library field (and tells people not to go to "cattle-car conferences" and to try to subvert practices that privilege such conferences); she views #10 as representing "stark terror"; she discusses the need for better information (marketing or whatever). She agrees with Dupuis that the statements show "a pronounced dearth of leadership"—and suggests, as a better starting point for conversations, the Darien statements. But that's another discussion.

A Conversation with Kristin Antelman

I'm not going to excerpt from or comment on this April 29, 2009 article (it's hard to call a 4,000-word item a post) by Brett Bonfield at *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*. I'm just going to point to it and note that it includes some discussion of the *context* for the Taiga statements—context that is notably *not available* to anyone who didn't attend the invitation-only conference. Oddly, Antelman refers to the original Taiga statements as "ten provocative statements" (maybe the final five weren't provocative?).

One thing's clear, at least for Antelman: she wants to confront "superficial optimism about how academic libraries—and librarians—will transition into new roles." And she seems to buy pretty clearly into this one: "we cannot support a hybrid print/electronic model indefinitely." Since I'm certain Antelman doesn't want to abandon electronic resources, there's only one way to read that: *Print must go*. I find that interesting and frankly wonder *why* a "hybrid" model can't continue indefinitely—but I'm not an AUL.

Antelman agrees that the Taiga Forum made a mistake in distributing the statements "in a static way, with a lack of transparency about their context"—but even after reading the interview, I find relatively little more enlightenment. Maybe you had to be at the conference—in which case, the statements ought not to have been distributed beyond the conference at all.

There have been more comments on the Taiga statements—but mostly in conjunction with the Darien statements. So let's look at those.

The Darien Statements on the Library and Librarians

That's the title of John Blyberg's April 3, 2009 post at *blyberg.net*—but also the title of the Statements. Here's his introduction:

> On March 26th, Darien Library hosted an event called "In the Foothills: A Not-Quite-Summit on the Future of Libraries" at which participants were instructed to "come prepared to help sketch out the role librarians should play in defining the future of libraries". The two speakers, John Berry and Kathryn Greenhill, provoked a conversation among me, Kathryn and Cindi Trainor that began in my office the next day and spilled out across the ensuing week.
>
> In companion posts, Kathryn and Cindi have beautifully captured the spirit in which this was written. Be sure to read them.
>
> Below is the resulting document. It's meant to be grand, optimistic, obvious, and thankful to and for our users, communities, and the tireless librarians who work the front lines every day, upholding the purpose of the Library.

Here's the document, in its entirety (it comes with a CC BY license; you could even sell it if you wished)—and without interjections:

The Purpose of the Library

The purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization.

The Library has a moral obligation to adhere to its purpose despite social, economic, environmental, or political influences. The purpose of the Library will never change.

The Library is infinite in its capacity to contain, connect and disseminate knowledge; librarians are human and ephemeral, therefore we must work together to ensure the Library's permanence.

Individual libraries serve the mission of their parent institution or governing body, but the purpose of the Library overrides that mission when the two come into conflict.

Why we do things will not change, but how we do them will.

A clear understanding of the Library's purpose, its role, and the role of librarians is essential to the preservation of the Library.

The Role of the Library

The Library:

➤ Provides the opportunity for personal enlightenment.

- ➢ Encourages the love of learning.
- ➢ Empowers people to fulfill their civic duty.
- ➢ Facilitates human connections.
- ➢ Preserves and provides materials.
- ➢ Expands capacity for creative expression.
- ➢ Inspires and perpetuates hope.

The Role of Librarians

Librarians:

- ➢ Are stewards of the Library.
- ➢ Connect people with accurate information.
- ➢ Assist people in the creation of their human and information networks.
- ➢ Select, organize and facilitate creation of content.
- ➢ Protect access to content and preserve freedom of information and expression.
- ➢ Anticipate, identify and meet the needs of the Library's community.

The Preservation of the Library

Our methods need to rapidly change to address the profound impact of information technology on the nature of human connection and the transmission and consumption of knowledge.

If the Library is to fulfill its purpose in the future, librarians must commit to a culture of continuous operational change, accept risk and uncertainty as key properties of the profession, and uphold service to the user as our most valuable directive.

As librarians, we must:

- ➢ Promote openness, kindness, and transparency among libraries and users.
- ➢ Eliminate barriers to cooperation between the Library and any person, institution, or entity within or outside the Library.
- ➢ Choose wisely what to stop doing.
- ➢ Preserve and foster the connections between users and the Library.
- ➢ Harness distributed expertise to serve the needs of the local and global community.
- ➢ Help individuals to learn and to use new tools to create a more robust path to knowledge.
- ➢ Engage in activism on behalf of the Library if its integrity is externally threatened.
- ➢ Endorse procedures only if they guide librarians or users to excellence.
- ➢ Identify and implement the most humane and efficient methods, tools, standards and practices.
- ➢ Adopt technology that keeps data open and free, abandon technology that does not.

- ➢ Be willing and have the expertise to make frequent radical changes.
- ➢ Hire the best people and let them do their job; remove staff who cannot or will not.
- ➢ Trust each other and trust the users.

We have faith that the citizens of our communities will continue to fulfill their civic responsibility by preserving the Library.

That's it. 511 words. Would that I could keep the discussion to even four times that length!

Long-time readers will spot my major problem right off the bat. I've said before that "there is no such thing as The Library." I continue to believe that—that "The Library" is not a useful construct, even philosophically, beyond such masterpieces as Ranganathan's Fifth Law (and I'm not sure about that). Other than that, I find myself pausing at the paragraph beginning "Individual libraries" and, to some extent, the last four bullets.

But "pausing" is the right term. Not "rejecting," not figuring out how to fisk them or the Statements as a whole. On the whole, and particularly when contrasted with Taiga's gloom and doom, these are pretty good. Do they lead anywhere? That's another question. Let's see what some library folk had to say...largely omitting the high-fives, as those don't add much to the conversation. Even with that omission, it's worth quoting some positive assessments that *do* add to the conversation and help expand or clarify some of the points, beginning with some of the comments on the post itself:

- ➢ **Steve Lawson**: "… I have always disliked the line of thought that tries to diminish the importance of the "library" in favor of the importance of the 'librarian' (or, worse, 'information professional') and I feel like you got the relationship of the librarian to the library just right here."
- ➢ **Mark Lindner**: "I love everything from the 2nd sentence of Purpose on. While there are perhaps 2 minor nits I would pick if I had been involved they aren't of consequence now. I am wondering if any of the drafter's of this excellent document might care to expound on what is meant by 'The purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization.' Because I honestly do not comprehend what that can possibly mean in relation to either librarians or libraries. Is it,

perhaps, that if the roles of the Library and Librarians are fulfilled then you feel that 'the integrity of civilization' will be preserved? That is the best reading I can give that sentence, although I disagree that it necessarily follows…"

➢ **Steve Lawson (responding to Lindner)**: "…Here's what it means to me… Libraries are our cultural memory and help ensure a continuity of our culture and civilization. If libraries disappeared overnight, it would take a while to feel it, but it would set our civilization back centuries." (I like that reading—a lot.)

➢ **Dorothea Salo (on the same point)**: "…The said integrity is not only threatened by accidental information loss. It is *also* threatened by censorship of all stripes, differential access, and intentional destruction of information. Librarians defend against those as well. I'll go against the grain here and say I like that purpose statement, precisely *because* it is hard to pin down."

➢ **Kevin Driedger**: "…The part I'm a bit puzzled by is 'The Library is infinite in its capacity to contain, connect and disseminate knowledge'—infinite? I realize I'm probably not fully understanding what you are trying to say, but even as a lofty ideal 'infinite' doesn't seem particularly helpful."

➢ **Steve Wilson**: "This sounds like some sort of fascism to me: 'The Library has a moral obligation to adhere to its purpose despite social, economic, environmental, or political influences. The purpose of the Library will never change.' 'Individual libraries serve the mission of their parent institution or governing body, but the purpose of the Library overrides that mission when the two come into conflict.' Citizen-funded and sponsored organizations are ultimately responsible to the citizens, not some ethereal code they make up. Replace 'library' with 'police department' and see how that sounds to you. It basically says 'we know better than you and when you tell us otherwise, we will do as we please anyway.' The library's authority arises from the citizenry and is limited by said body."

➢ **"Alan," responding to Wilson**: "Just so I understand what you are saying, a police department should club down civil rights marchers because a politician tells it to do so? And a library take orders from a politician who orders it to purchase only materials on one side or the other of an issue? I think you are misreading. I read the paragraphs you quote to mean the opposite of how you interpret them. I think they say that a library should look past the intervening parent or governing body to the interests of the citizens, when the library believes the interests of the citizens and the parent or governing body have come into conflict."

➢ **John Blyberg**: "The initial statement of purpose in this document serves as a foundation for the rest of the text. By saying that the 'purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization,' we were not trying to be gratuitous or vague. We wanted to articulate, in the simplest way possible, our understanding of the purpose of the Library. I'll echo what Alan said and add that we have to be very clear as to who and what we are responsible for. While we may be accountable to our citizenry, our responsibility is to our purpose. Dorothea is right when she says the 'said integrity is not only threatened by accidental information loss. It is *also* threatened by censorship of all stripes, differential access, and intentional destruction of information.' Add to that list: illiteracy, misinformation, unemployment, apathy, preoccupation, etc. As mentioned in the statements, we best address these corrosive elements by making service to the user our most valuable directive."

➢ **Kathryn Greenhill**: "Just to add to John's words… the first sentence also tried to echo some of what John Berry was saying at the summit at Darien. His argument was that libraries are integral to civilisation and good governance by creating a large, well-educated group of people exposed to a multiplicity of points of view. We had to cut words, but we were clear in our discussion that what we do is different to educators and schools….and the rest of the statements try to explicate this point of difference from other professions. The lack of formal curricula in libraries, the tolerance of points of view that we may personally think are misguided, the quest for the

best possible collection and the widest ways of connecting people... are all elements that I believe can create a citizenry that is able to keep a watch on how they are governed and hopefully strive together for the most civilised outcomes."

➢ **Joy Palmer**: "I find the aims of this statement laudable... However, there *is* something about the rhetoric here that needs to be looked at more carefully. Scott Wilson has been resolutely dismissed for 'not getting it' but I have to say I believe he's on to something. The problem is this monolithic invocation of 'The Library.' I'm sorry, but it could be replaced easily with the 'the State.' We have a rhetorical problem here, where 'The Library' is positioned as a moral authority, 'responsible' for civilisation, a caring (but all-knowing) steward, 'infinite in its capacity to contain, connect and disseminate knowledge.' I personally find this characterisation a bit unsettling. This might not be the tone that is intended, but I'm afraid for some of us, this is what comes across. Is there a monolithic entity we can call 'The Library'? And do we actually want it?..."

➢ **Phil Bradley**: "What is 'civilization'? Who is defining this? And what about a situation in which civilizations disagree with each other? How is 'integrity' defined? It's far too broad and meaningless a statement for me as it stands at the moment I'm afraid. Which isn't to say that there's not a lot of good stuff in there of course!"

➢ **Heather Beckman**: "I have to agree with the people who are disquieted by the monolithic 'Library' (with a capital L!) portrayed in this statement. I am really on board with a lot of what you're saying about how libraries are forces for change, personal growth, and social justice, but... 'the Library' as described in the opening parts of this statement is alien to me. To me, libraries *are* the people who work in them and visit them. They are not institutions that go on unheeding of the people who build, maintain, and use them. The 'Library' of this statement sounds cold, distant, and inhuman. I think of libraries as vibrant places, intimately intertwined with their communities, human

and, yes, ephemeral! The institution changes day by day as we and our patrons interact with it. It is not some entity that exists outside of and beyond us. Nor can it possibly exist outside of, or fail to be affected by, 'social, economic, environmental, or political influences...'"

➢ **John Blyberg**: "...The idea of a Platonic Library is, of course, a crucial element of the statements. In fact, it is the keystone of the document's structure, so I'd caution against dismissing it outright before considering it. The three of us hold firmly to the statement, 'why we do things will not change, but how we do them will.' We are not this week's librarians, nor even this decade's librarians. We are somewhere along the continuum of a legacy of librarians.... I would say, then, that it's not a matter of whether we should have a Platonic Library, but whether we admit that we do. Where does our institutional authority spring from, if not the Library? The degree? Experience? Tradition? Our users? Our government? None of those things are unshakable. But the Library is..." [Less than half of a longer comment]

There are a *lot* more comments—104 comments and linkbacks as of January 18, 2010, although the last substantive direct comment appeared on May 8, 2009. Since the stream of comments make up more than 9,000 words (of which I've quoted more than 1,400), I'll just note a few other points from signed comments (as most of them were). Mark Lindner found other points to be too vague to be useful; "Lenny" found the "manifesto" self-negating; Jamie LaRue wondered whether this was preaching to the choir (not his words!); Joseph McDonald suggested the Statements were "a buggy whip maker's whistling in the dark"; some people loved the statement; some found it grandiose.

That's just *direct* comments on this post. Kathryn Greenhill posted her own comments on writing the Statements in an April 4, 2009 post at *Librarians Matter*. So did Cindi Trainor at *Citegeist*. I'll refer you back to those two posts. Meanwhile, a few other reactions, excerpted as briefly as possible. (There were a *lot* of adulatory posts; think of them as a background chorus of cheers behind the occasional grumps and clarifications noted here.)

The so-called Darien Statement bothers me...

From StephenK (Kellat), posted April 5, 2009 on his *LISNews* blog. He comments on several areas, not all mentioned here:

> *On the Purpose statement:* How does that square with enabling legislation in most cases? Public libraries are public institutions and normally are creatures of statute. Libraries can only do what is authorized by statute. I imagine that the integrity of civilization is not something allocated as a responsibility of libraries in enabling legislation.
>
> *On "moral obligation":* History has shown instead that the purpose of the library has in fact changed. With the rise of "third space" theory and more, libraries have shifted in focus from being only storehouses to additionally being commons.
>
> *On purpose overriding mission*: That cannot happen in a public institution. Insubordination is a firing offense in most government bureaucracies and librarians generally do not have tenure protections that might insulate them in these cases. There are normally only two choices when faced with instructions you cannot follow: resign or comply.
>
> *Overall:* In the end, it reflects a view of professional practice I've rarely encountered. What the statement aspires to seems to not be the norm in the US.

Most comments were anonymous, and I'm not including anonymous comments.

"The Library" and Other Grand Unifications

Iris Jastram posted this on April 5, 2009 at *Pegasus Librarian*—and she likes the response she's seen to the Statements.

> So far, it seems that people take a deep breath, let the statements sink in, feel them, taste them, and then start comparing them to everything we do and have done and hope to do in this profession, trying to see how the statements stack up against reality. This strikes me as a beautiful response. Even most of the responses that contend that "Your Library-with-a-capital-L doesn't pertain to my library" or that "saying that 'The purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization' is far too ambiguous" are evidence of this kind of productive, stimulative thinking.

Jastram wonders what we learn by "theorizing a Platonic Library." "In what ways does this focus our thoughts and motivate our futures regardless of our individual circumstances?" You really need to read her post to get the flavor of what she's saying, which is rooted in a T.S. Eliot essay. She does see virtue in the Platonic Library:

> [B]eing a librarian in a particular library is rendered meaningful and significant not solely based on our own individual missions and actions. We have the fundamentals of The Library that bolster our efforts and define our innovations....
>
> If we accept the theory of the Platonic Library...then we are also accepting that as each of us effects change, we fundamentally affect The Library as a whole. This strikes me as a daunting, inspiring, thought provoking, somewhat terrifying, but empowering outcome of theorizing a Platonic Library even for the many individual libraries that may not feel included in the Darien Statements.

"The idea of a Library-with-a-capital-L" resonates strongly with Jastram. I respect that, and recommend her post. That it doesn't resonate as strongly with me is, I suspect, my own failing.

Darien Statements on the Library

But I also respect Mary Beth Sancomb-Moran, and in this April 6, 2009 post at *Impromptu Librarian*, she takes issue with portions of the Statements.

> While I applaud the group for having a discussion about all of this, I must admit I have a few issues with the resulting statements about the purpose of the library. "The purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization." Seriously? Preserve the integrity of civilization?? First of all, what does that mean? Secondly, it confers a grandiose and superior purpose to an institution that at its core is grounded and—in the case of public libraries—meant for the common man.
>
> In my mind, libraries do two main things: 1) collect stuff and 2) organize it so it can be found and used. A codicil might be that we make stuff available for whomever wants to use it.
>
> It certainly can be argued that when information in whatever form is sequestered or limited or banned outright, it's not a good thing. In fact, the first thing a fascist government will do in order to gain control of its people is restrict access to information. I'm assuming that it's this library function that the writers were considering when saying that libraries preserve the integrity of civilization. But I would argue that to state it in that way clouds the issue and uses the kind of language that sets up an adverse reaction.
>
> We struggle mightily with our profession. I've written before on how interesting it is that we wring our hands and wonder endlessly whether we're being taken seriously enough. Unfortunately, I think statements such as these are more likely to elicit eye-rolling from the general public rather than a serious understanding of what we're about and why we're essential.

After quoting the last set of bullets and finding them (all?) to her taste, she concludes:

> I don't mean to be disparaging about what this group did, as it's always a good thing when people get together and hash these things out. I tend towards the more common rather than the ethereal, hence my issues with some of the language and positions taken. (I have similar issues with most mission statements.) Let's keep talking....

Reflection on the Darien Statements

"Colleen" considered the Statements in this April 7, 2009 post at *Guardienne of the Tomes*. Again, it's a post you're well-advised to read in its entirety, and it's worth noting that Colleen works in Access & Delivery in an academic library, which "definitely feels one floor down in the ivory tower sense of the library's educational mission" but essential for the library's existence. She finds the Statements "lovely in an aspirational sense."

> The trouble occurs when you take the Platonic form of Library as it'd discussed in the Statements, and then give the Statement to "little-l" librarians to pick apart. Because let's be honest—we don't work in Library, we work in libraries. Law libraries, academic libraries, corporate libraries, and more may share similar basic values, but our missions and the communities we serve may differ drastically.

There's more, and it's mostly positive.

The Darien Statements on the Library and Librarians

In this case, that's the title of John Dupuis' April 9, 2009 post at *Confessions of a Science Librarian*—and he's not in a fisking mood here. "For the most part, I really like the statements. They are optimistic and forward thinking, envisioning the best that libraries and librarians can be. They represent something to aspire to." But he has a few quibbles:

> I'm never too pleased to see rhetoric like, "Hire the best people and let them do their job; remove staff who cannot or will not," especially just after they say, "Identify and implement the most humane and efficient methods, tools, standards and practices." This kind of corporate, Wal-Mart, race-to-the-bottom approach to HR is the wrong approach for public or non-profit institutions.

> Frankly, some of the statements are a bit overstated, almost veering into the sentimental and mawkish. For example, "The purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization" or "The Library has a moral obligation to adhere to its purpose despite social, economic, environmental, or political influences. The purpose of the Li-

brary will never change." I would have a hard time reciting those in front of a group of faculty and keeping a straight face. While ducking tomatoes.

> I feel that the statements aren't really aimed at academic libraries so much as public or even national libraries. I'm sure many in institutional or special libraries would feel the same way. This isn't a big deal, of course, but it would have been nice to see something a bit more explicit about Information Literacy, for example. As I mentioned above, the current incarnation probably wouldn't go over that well among faculty or academic administrators, who would tend to see themselves as the guardians of civilization. It might make an interesting exercise to remix the statements to be more applicable to the academic environment.

And, as he says, those are quibbles.

on first looking into the Darien Statements

Leave it to Laura Crossett to link to a *different* Darien and offer an interesting perspective, in this April 9, 2009 post at *lis.dom*. She notes Keats' poem on Cortez (and her initial reaction that it was, after all, *wrong*) and relates it to the Statements:

> Some days it's important to remember the dates and places and times. Some preliminary knowledge about the world and its shape and its features and its history is useful—even necessary—for getting by in it. But some days—not all days, perhaps, but some—it's also important to stare at the Pacific, to glance around at your compatriots with a wild surmise, to stand silently and contemplate the awesome mysterious wonderfulness of it all.

> Similarly, it's important to run your library. It's important to get the books on the shelves correctly, to have a diverse and up to date collection, to provide timely reference services to your patrons, to keep your public computers running. That's all important. But sometimes it is important to stand back from that for a few moments and think about what it is you're doing and why you're doing it. If the Darien Statements do anything, I hope they help us all feel for a moment like the men on that other Darien, as though we've discovered a new old world, or an old new world, all over again and ought to contemplate just what it is and what we are and what we should be doing and why.

If you think I'm going to try to improve on Crossett's wording or thinking here, you have another think coming.

Preserving the Integrity of Civilization

Wayne Bivens-Tatum focuses on both "the Library" and that Purpose statement in this April 11, 2009 post at *Academic Librarian*—and, once again,

I'll mostly point (blogs.princeton.edu/librarian/) and say "go read it." Excerpts:

> The first problem for me was *the Library*. Maybe it's something about the singular and the capitalization that bothers me, the assumption that there's some essence common to all libraries, the librariness of the library existing in the mind of God or something. One of the reasons I focus on academic libraries is that I don't think there is a *Library*; there are libraries of all sorts and all types, and there doesn't seem to be much that they have in common. We might say they all provide access to information of some kind to some set of users as a common denominator. That seems to be about it, and that doesn't seem enough to warrant the singular, capitalized noun. In my mind I always contrast the tiny public library that serves my grandmother and the largish academic library I work in. They are vastly different libraries with very different goals. If we add in school and special libraries, the variety becomes even greater...

> If there is no one Library, then there can be no one purpose. But even if there were one Library and one purpose, would it be to preserve the integrity of civilization? In addition to implying that there's a Library, this statement also implies there's a civilization, and that this civilization has integrity....

Comments on Both Documents

Let's close with a few posts that comment on *both* Taiga 4 and the Darien Statements. It's certainly a natural compare-and-contrast situation, given that discussion of Taiga 4 began right around the time of Darien and that the two are so very different.

Making a statement

Steve Lawson (April 3, 2009, *See Also...*: stevelawson.name/seealso/) set out for "a snarky little post" about Taiga. And decided he'd rather not "waste any more time on Taiga," instead focusing on the Darien Statements.

> These statements are a clear mountain stream in contrast to the dank little catbox of the Taiga statements.

> And let's talk about provocative. Taiga wants to provoke us to discuss whether the library will be completely culturally irrelevant in five years and whether faculty and administrators hate us more than we hate ourselves. Darien wants us to discuss just what it means to say "the purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization."

> I know which discussion I'd rather have....

I'd agree, even as I have qualms. Tim Spalding commented, not being too wild about either statemen:

> [D]oesn't the whole "the Library"—capitalized every time—irritate you? "The purpose of the Library is to preserve the integrity of civilization." That may not provoke librarians, but you can bet many outsiders look at that and think "overblown Victorianism in the service of an exaggerated sense of self." The Taiga statements are gloomy, but the Darien ones are pious.

Lawson isn't bothered by "the Library": "I think it helps distinguish the concept of the library from the individual libraries where we work and read." He also feels that the Darien Statements "provide a framework for discussing what is valuable about libraries (or 'the Library') in almost any imaginable future. It's not as memorable and elegant as Ranganathan's Laws, but I admire the attempt at universality."

The future of libraries

"Suelibrarian" posted this on April 4, 2009 at her eponymous blog. She found the Taiga statements "disappointing" and noted the extent to which they were critiqued by this point—and was disappointed by the "lack of discussion" on the Darien Statements, even though her reaction was positive. I would note how early in the game this was: *one day* after the Statements appeared—and there was quite a bit of discussion in the following week or two.

Suelibrarian's chief problem (can you guess?) is with that grand purpose statement:

> This would be true of any civic institution. Substitute school or police or court in there and it's still true. The rest logically arises from that one sentence. The differentials between libraries and other civic institutions are covered by the role statements. The purpose statement thus applies to public libraries, academic libraries and state libraries and (thank goodness) my library as the institution we serve is in itself covered by the purpose statement.

> My one nit pick is what about the libraries that are not part of civic institutions? What about those librarians who are employed to serve the information needs of a corporation or company? The prime purpose of the company is make money for its owners. Statements about triple bottom lines and civic responsibilities don't take away from that fact. The purpose of the library and librarian employed by a corporation cannot be encompassed by the purpose statement from Darien. As a consequence they cannot be governed by the statement "Individual libraries serve the mission of their parent institution or governing body, but the purpose of the Library overrides that mission when the two come into conflict." Do we expect those libraries and librarians to also serve the higher purpose of the rest

of the profession? Or do we call these something else besides libraries and librarians? This has been discussed ad nauseum over the years in regards to the whole profession.

An interesting point—made *more* interesting by John Blyberg's comment:

> We discussed special libraries specifically in the context of the initial statement of purpose and came to the same conclusion you have here. Actually, what I think we said is that it might work for special libraries in some cases but that we would not, by default, include them in the concept of Library (capital L) as presented in the document.

So special libraries aren't part of The Library, but (all) school, public and academic libraries are? That's an interesting cutting-out exercise. (Steve Lawson also commented, noting that many people may have a problem with "how 'my library' fits into 'The Library.'" True enough.)

Takes a community to raise a library. It takes a library to raise a community.
Mita Williams, on April 8, 2009 at *New Jack Librarian,* has mixed feelings:

> If the Darien Statements on the Library and Librarians were specifically meant as a volley back to the The Taiga 4 Provocative Statements, then I think they are a brilliant response to the fear-mongering that is trying to be passed off as leadership.

> If otherwise, well, to be honest, I'm not that crazy about the Darien Statements. But that's okay. Those aren't my statements on The (One Big?) Library and Librarians. It's theirs.

Williams takes issue with that grand purpose.

> Now saving civilization might be a good idea but I would leave that job up to superheroes and those working towards nuclear nonproliferation. I haven't properly worked out my own idea of The Library's purpose but if I did, it would definitely contain these two words: *share* and *community*.

> *Share* is the most important word. We don't sell the stuff we collect. We share it.

> And when I use the word *community* I mean, a group of people with a common interest. So that could be a group of graduate students in a lab or a small town.

It's an interesting alternative. To date, there have been no comments.

More Provocative (if less provoking) Statements
Barbara Fister didn't much care for Taiga 4 but has a much more positive reaction to Darien, in this April 10, 2009 post at *ACRLog*.

> Maybe there's a bit of mom and apple pie here, the odd gamboling unicorn under a pastel rainbow, but this document too could be the bases of interesting discussions. Are these the things we value? If so, how do we express those values in what we do? And what adjustments will we have to make to live up to them?

She chooses three statements in particular and considers how academic librarians might discuss each one. The three: "The library encourages the love of learning," "Librarians connect people with accurate information" and "Librarians should adopt technology that keeps data open and free [and] abandon technology that does not." They're all interesting discussions, worth reading in the original post. There are also a couple of interesting comments.

And that may be as good a stopping point as any. The Darien Statements are far from perfect (and I may never get my head around a couple of points in them), but as ways to *provoke discussion*, they seem far more positive than Taiga's jeremiad.

Unfortunately, that's not how things seem to have worked out. Doing a Google blogs search on "Darien statements" limited to posts after April 9, 2009, there's almost nothing—the Antelman conversation already noted earlier, a followup from *Academic Librarian*, slides from a talk given in May 2009, and two more posts, one from April 23, 2009, one from May 8, 2009. After that, all is silence.

The April 23 post is from Steven Bell and covers a range of topics—and he seems to feel that Ranganathan might be afraid to publish his Five Laws in 2009, "worried that some anonymous blogger might ridicule it into oblivion or that other bloggers might just rip it to shreds to get their tribe riled up." I *surely* didn't see that happen with the Darien Statements (save one pseudonymous troll whose whole purpose is provocation) and, well, it's hard for me to argue that criticism of the Taiga 4 statements was undeserved. (I don't think you can simultaneously call for more discussion and argumentation and shy away from attacks—some argumentation is *always* going to be forceful.) The May 8 post seems to be entirely excerpts from the Academic Librarian post.

What happened to the discussion? It faded away—as it did for Taiga 4. In the latter case, that's probably just as well. In the former—well, if you think of Darien as a manifesto (I don't, which is fortunate because I *really* dislike manifestos as a form), it lacked enough bite and actionability to

keep people engaged, and if you think of it as a statement of ideals, maybe librarians are too busy keeping on keeping on.

Conclusion: If I had my Druthers…

It's probably just as well that Taiga 4 faded away. If it was an internal working document for discussion during the Taiga session, it should have been treated as such. If it was just a series of possible futures, some of them *acknowledged* to be awful, it needed a much more robust presentation.

Darien? That's a little more difficult. You also have the difficulty of Statements emerging from small, relatively closed groups. There are still problems with universalism. But the Darien Statements are, by and large, optimistic and challenging rather than pessimistic and seemingly defeatist. Would they make good bases for extended discussion? I'm not sure—but I'd certainly rather attend such discussions than I would discussions based on Taiga 4.

But, of course, I'm not the audience: I'm not a librarian, I'm *certainly* not part of the generations that need to move libraries forward—and I'm not generally fond of manifestos and grand statements.

Perspective

Writing about Reading 5: Going Down Slow

Let's talk about slow reading.

Maybe it's the Native Northern Californian in me, but when I hear about the various "slow" initiatives—slow food primarily, but also "slow cities" (or Cittaslow), "slow art," "slow travel" and "slow parenting," all sometimes gathered up into a slow-moving Slow Movement—I don't so much get "slow" in any direct sense, at least not for all of them.

What I get is *being there*—or, rather, *being here*. You could call that reflection; you could call it an aspect of Zen Buddhism carried far beyond the Buddhist community; you could call it consciousness. With all due respect to the gurus of the slow movement (if there are such), I'm not sure that "slowing down life's pace" has much to do with it, and I'm not at all convinced that "need to belong" and "togetherness" (in both cases, quoting *Wikipedia*'s entry on the Slow Movement) are key

aspects. (I'm a bit chagrined that the so-called "World Institute of Slowness" uses quick little videos as its introductions to each aspect—that seems, frankly, oxymoronic.)

Indeed, for some varieties of "slow," I think the desire is for *multiple* speeds—but as a long-time advocate of "And, Not Or," I *would* think that, wouldn't I? I don't believe we're well-served by advocating that *everything* in a given area be "slow"— but that we're *extremely* well-served by being aware that different activities within a sphere deserve and benefit from different levels of attention, consciousness, awareness—if you will, speed.

Too many of today's high profile observers seem to think speed rules out slowness. So, for example, we get the nonsensical idea that, because many of us spend a fair amount of time skimming text on the internet and jumping from one thing to another, we're no longer *capable* of giving one text our full attention for an extended period. My immediate response to any such claim (frequently stated in the form of a book, usually something that requires full attention for an extended period) is to think "Speak for yourself." That may be a correct and adequate response.

But it's true that we can *forget* the desirability of slowing down, the deeper meaning and satisfaction that (sometimes) comes from being here. If I hear an intelligent person saying they think books should be broken down into 140-character messages, I sigh inside: There goes a person who has lost track of slow. They're likely to be a person who walks down the street on a beautiful summer (or winter) day, eyes glued to a smartphone, ears occupied with random music—ignoring the sights and sounds all around. That's sad. I don't believe it's universal—and I don't believe you have to give up one to have the other.

John Miedema and Slow Reading

I deliberately wrote the introduction above *before* going to John Miedema's work (which I'd last reviewed two years ago)—but in the belief that Miedema would largely agree with me, or I with him.

So it is. Quoting from "Slow Reading" on Miedema's website (johnmiedema.ca/portfolio/slow-reading/):

Slow reading is about reading at a reflective pace.

There are many different kinds of reading, both fast and slow. Fast reading is greatly facilitated by digi-

tal technology. For a time, we thought that digital technology would replace books altogether. We were wrong about that. Print and books are more prevalent than ever. We are in the middle of a cultural shift that is still learning the proper place of digital technology. Fast information is terrific when we need a quick, rough answer, but like fast food it often leaves one hungering for something more substantial. Digital technology is terrific for finding information and reading short snippets, but print and books lend themselves to slow reading, a form of reading that is more pleasant and often is the only way to really understand a concept.

Many types of reading are improved by reading slowly: literature with rich dimensions that might be missed if read too quickly; local stories that engage our personal memories; and research materials that require sustained thought for understanding. Slow readers might only read a page or two at a time, reading and re-reading until they apprehend the experience or meaning represented in the text.

Those are the first three paragraphs of a nine-paragraph introduction to Miedema's work in this area. Miedema does *not* call for an end to fast reading or skimming. He notes that slow reading is related to *locality*—another way of saying "being here." He says slow readers support local libraries and that slow reading is "a form of resistance, challenging a hectic culture that requires speed reading of volumes of information fragments." He calls slow reading therapeutic and believes it's good for "our minds, our emotional health, our communities and planet." I'm inclined to agree for the most part—and that's with the note that I probably do ten times as much fast reading as I do slow reading.

I've been slow in getting to this discussion. It required slowing down a bit, reflecting on the theme, thinking about meaning. In the literature review Miedema did for his MLIS degree, he uses "Voluntary Slow Reading," and that may be a useful distinction—since some people read slowly involuntarily, because of dyslexia or other issues. Involuntary slow reading *could* be frustrating; voluntary slow reading *should* be rewarding. (If it isn't, *read something else*. You may not get *Ulysses* not because you're not reading it slowly enough but because it's just not your cup of Joyce.)

The first item on the small stack of lead sheets I compiled for this discussion, beginning November 5, 2007, is a dead end. It's from *slowreading.net*—and that site no longer exists (it was a

wordpress.com blog). Neither does the specific post, as far as I can tell: phrase searches on Bing and Google consistently yield zero results. Was Miedema the proprietor at *slowreading.net*? Possibly—and Miedema is clear about deleting blog posts, which he does often and without apology. (There's a post about that—"I Delete Blog Posts: The Web is Not Print," dated November 29, 2008—but I hesitate to provide the URL because, well, *John Miedema deletes posts*. I understand and appreciate his reasoning for deleting posts—and urging others to do likewise—but have tended to view my own posts, and more specifically *C&I*, as being more directly akin to publishing. Different people, different conclusions. Notably, Miedema *will* send copies of deleted posts to people who request them.)

For a while, Miedema's blog—then and now at johnmiedema.ca—carried *Slow Reading* as a title. Now, you can find posts on that topic (including ones since the name changed) under the Slow Reading category (johnmiedema.ca/category/slowreading/). They date back to "The persistence of the book" on February 24, 2007 and, as of this writing, forward to an October 22, 2009 post noting Miedema's speech at the Library of Congress about his book—which, oddly enough, is entitled *Slow Reading* (Litwin Books; ISBN 978-0-9802004-4-7; $12, 78 pages).

It's tempting to go through the five pages of archival posts, quoting and commenting; I read most of the posts as they emerged and flagged several for later use (before I began "Writing About Reading"). But if I do that, I'll wind up with a section likely to be nearly as long as Miedema's book—and I suspect you're a *lot* better off reading the book. To a very great extent, I suspect, the posts—some of which are fairly long, carefully-written essays—served as thoughts toward and drafts of portions of the book. They're valuable in that regard, and likely to reward a combination of fast and slower reading.

A Few Quotes along the Way

I will *not* choose the cite, comment and synthesize approach I tend to favor. But I can't resist quoting a few full and partial paragraphs here and there, each one with the date on which it was posted—recognizing that paragraphs appear without context.

> There is no doubt in my mind that our relationship with books will change. Not e-Books. The mistake all along was that digital technology would replace books... There is no separate digital

domain that is taking over; there is instead a continuum of information modes, both digital and traditional, meeting different needs. Witness how Web 2.0 technologies are evolving to enhance the constant of the book. Library 2.0 and sites like LibraryThing make it easier for me to find the books I want. On-line, I can evaluate portions of books. If it is a good one, I go to my library's website and place a hold. It's all good. Then, I take the book home and read it old style. The change we are witnessing is books fitting into a much larger spectrum of information resources. Books used to be the only source, now they are just the final and best source. I for one am quite happy with this new arrangement. [February 24, 2007]

Slow reading is not just about fiction; it's about reading deeply and reflectively to understand an issue thoroughly. Few people can do that effectively on-line; the end of books is the end of deep thought. Fast information is great when I need a quick, rough answer, but like fast food it often leaves me hungering for something more substantial. [April 30, 2007]

To support slow reading, libraries do not need to stop growing, but they need to keep their mission rooted in the essentials—books (including the fiction shelves), local libraries, and people living in communities. The library can subordinate technology toward the creation of a culture of reading and writing. One exciting way that libraries could do this is through the development of a micropublishing program. [Same post, April 30, 2007.]

While speed-readers attempt to read as fast as possible, slow readers exercise the freedom to vary the rate of their reading, and do not necessarily always read as slow as possible. A slow reader may skim over less interesting passages, and then slow down due to read the important parts. The freedom to vary the rate of reading is closely tied to the voluntary aspect of slow reading. [January 21, 2008, from a series "Voluntary Slow Reading: A Facet Analysis."]

Reports from avid readers also shed light on VSR. Ross, McKechnie & Rothbauer (2006) observed that "the most common image of the reader is the solitary person—intent scholar or entranced novel reader—who is 'lost in a book.'" Without subscribing to a stereotype, there is something in this image that captures the state of slow reader captivated by a text. VSR is often characterized as a consuming activity... Reports from avid readers give the same impression, with readers stating that the experience gives them "a much greater internal world" (166). Citing Holland, "a reader responds to a literary work by assimilating it into his own psycholog-

ical processes" (166). [April 10, 2008, from a series "Voluntary Slow Reading: The Research."]

Reading on-line is different from reading print, and in general print seems better suited to slow reading. It is the very nature of hypertext to point the reader away from the page currently being read, distracting the reader from an in-depth reading that is associated with VSR. Carusi (2006) compared the reading of hypertext to linear literary text. The "binding" of hypertext is the link by which "the reader creates his or her own path through the text and, in so doing, co-creates the text" (167). A traditional book assumes a whole, which will be reconstructed through reading. This second kind of reading assumes a linear recreation of the author's thought, allowing the reading to discover unexpected ideas rather than just reinforcing the ones they brought to the reading. [April 10, 2008, from a series "Voluntary Slow Reading: The Research."]

There's much more to chew on in the series of posts—and, I suspect, in the book. If Miedema was calling for slow reading as a universal desideratum, I'd argue—just as I argue with those who seem to think hyperlinks are *the future* of text and reading. But Miedema does no such thing. He looks at a continuum of media and purposes, and sees the virtues of slow reading within that continuum.

I can't recommend a book I haven't (yet) read. But since the book is an update and expansion of the themes expressed in Miedema's posts on this topic, it's fair to assume that it's likely to be quite good. Portions of Leigh Anne Vraibel's April 14, 2009 review of the book at *Library Alchemy*:

Face it: if you had a dollar for every time you heard one of the technorati say that "print is dead", you'd be able to thumb your nose at your 403(b) and set sail for the sun-drenched island of your choice. Alas, until now, the response to such a deeply ignorant statement has been the sputtering incoherence of thousands of library workers who know better, but can't cogently explain why because we're too busy picking our jaws up off the floor or scraping our exploded brains off the ceiling.

Thanks to John Miedema, those of us who recognize and advocate the value of books and paper now have a catchphrase of our own, a scholarly framework within which to compose our arguments, and a physical object to wave in the faces of those who would march us off to twopointopia willy-nilly. "Slow reading," a term grounded in the same ideology that informed the Slow Movement, is defined and contextualized by a body of scholarship from library science as well as literary crit-

icism, and exemplifies a middle way that acknowledges various ways of reading and meaning-making in a calm, reasonable fashion...

One of my frustrations with our profession is that those people with opposing viewpoints or alternative solutions express themselves either so stridently that their opponents cannot find an entry point, or so quietly that their voices go entirely undetected. Slow Reading strikes the perfect balance between these two extremes with credible scholarship and a concerned, yet measured, tone that allows the reader to accept Miedema's arguments and weigh them against his/her own personal and professional experience....

The Future?

Miedema's up to it again, with a vengeance. His new project is "I, Reader"—and he renamed his blog for a period. It's another book project and appears to be considerably more extensive. So extensive, in fact, that I'm not even willing to offer an overview.

The series of posts comes to 45 in all. From any post in the series you can link to all the others. Once again, he's explicitly using his blog as part of the writing process. The new project is "an exploration of the connections between deep reading and web participation" (the title is a nod to Isaac Asimov's classic collection of stories, *I, Robot*).

It looks to be an interesting project. Beyond that, I'll refer you back to Miedema's site.

Related Posts

These posts touch on "deep reading" and other relatives of slow reading.

Deep Reading

Technically, this is a followup—T. Scott Plutchak's commentary based on Nicholas Carr's "Is Google Making Us Stupid?"—which I discussed in December 2008, in the very first WRITING ABOUT READING. I'll point you back to December 2008 (starting at page 10) if you want to review the discussion. I *love* T. Scott's reason for not posting a commentary right off the bat:

> ...I've been thinking about posting something myself, but my penchant for deep reading of long texts has been interfering with my ability to skim superficially in search of a couple of little factoids that I can quickly respond to. Despite the amount of time that I spend online, my brain seems to be stubbornly resisting getting rewired.

After that genial razzberry in Carr's general direction, T. Scott has what I increasingly regard as an appropriate reaction to Clay Shirky's commentary, which includes this text: "no one reads *War and Peace*. It's too long, and not so interesting." Namely, after you read a generalization that "eminently silly," why bother to seek out the worthwhile things that *might* be in the commentary?

> I find myself stopping at that point to think, Does he [Shirky] really believe that no one reads *War and Peace*? Or does he really mean "No one except dweebs who don't realize that it's too long and boring?" Just exactly what point is he actually trying to make here? By then I'm bored with him and rather than trying to puzzle it out, I go back to reading Europe: A History (I'm on page 329—only 800 left to go. Yummy.)

T. Scott makes a point that's easy to miss when discussing reading *depth* and reading *medium:*

> As with most discussions about the impact of the digital world, the print vs. online dichotomy is a false one. It assumes that the gulf between any reading online and any reading in print is fundamentally deeper and wider than the gulf between reading one of [James] Liddy's enigmatic, allusive poems and, say, Tom Friedman's *The World Is Flat*. This is nonsense, but how would one know unless one reads widely? (I read a blog post recently by a young librarian who is reading a nonfiction book for the first time—she's always only read novels. Ask her how different those reading experiences are.)

There's more to the post. The main points, I believe, are that depth of reading isn't inherently linked to reading medium—and that there's much of value to be found in books *and* online.

One comment, from "datamuse," includes an interesting thought—one I find has resonance:

> I'm starting to think that the problem has less to do with format, and more to do with environment. On the Web, it's so easy to be distracted by something else, especially if you're the kind of person (and I am) who multitasks compulsively. Conversely, when I'm reading a book, I'm usually in a chair away from my computer; if, for some reason, I'm reading a book *at* my computer, I find it much harder to concentrate on the text.

Slow reading and deep reading—whether they're the same thing or two different things—both require *focus*.

Reading Online is Not Reading On Paper

In this post (by Will Richardson on September 28, 2008 at *weblogg-ed*), there's a clear distinction that *is* format-based. He's discussing another article but also his own reading habits.

Probably 75% of what I read I read online. The other 25% is almost all books. I read all of my news from papers, magazines, etc. online, all of my correspondence, all of the blogs that I follow. And, as I've written before, my reading habits have changed a great deal. It has become an effort for me to work with longer texts, to do sustained reading and thinking, to stick with complex narratives.

For Richardson, there's a contradiction between online reading and slow or deep reading ("sustained reading and thinking"). Instead of, say, *four* possibilities (online:fast, online:slow, print:fast, print:slow), Richardson may be suggesting that "online:slow" is difficult if not impossible. (Or I may be reading into what he says.)

Richardson doesn't see that we necessarily lose the ability for slow reading:

I've made myself take time over the last few months to read longer texts, and after plowing through three really, really engaging and challenging novels in the past month or so, I'm feeling like my brain is back in gear somehow. It's getting closer to balance.

I suspect T. Scott would tell Richardson he needs to look into a big, fat, dense, *nonfiction* book.

Sapping students' initiative

This October 3, 2008 post by Steve Lawson at *See Also...* is only tangentially about slow reading or deep reading. It's another commentary on the article Richardson was commenting on. I'm noting it because Lawson raises an excellent point that can get smudged in the effort to encourage the kind of deep reading that may be best done offline.

Namely, it's absurd to force use of offline materials when online is better for the task at hand. In the original article is this remarkable passage:

Last year when I required students in a literature survey course to obtain obituaries of famous writers without using the Internet, they stared in confusion. Checking a reference book, asking a librarian, and finding a microfiche didn't occur to them. So many free deliveries through the screen had sapped that initiative.

Lawson's immediate reaction:

Their initiative wasn't sapped. They just couldn't understand why an obituary that took them half an hour to retrieve from a microfilm of the New York Times was in any way more valid than the exact same obituary retrieved from the archive of the New York Times online.

Lawson's a librarian; he wants students to talk to librarians and use libraries—"and I even think it's great to encourage them to use printed journals and microfilm. The fact is there's still a lot of stuff that's not online. *But newspaper obituaries*?" [Emphasis added.]

The way to get people to appreciate the virtues of printed text and the strengths of deep reading are to find areas where printed text and deep reading *add value*. I don't believe obituaries fall into one of those areas. Although there are death appreciations that are written so well they reward slow reading, they're rare.

At least at the (admittedly atypical) small, private, expensive liberal arts college where I work, the students seem to crave offline reading of important books. I'm not saying that many of them won't cut corners when given a chance, and I'm not saying that their first thought when it's time to do research is to check a reference book and hit the microforms.

But if we want to want to show them the richness of the complicated, multifaceted, multi-format environment that is the modern day academic library, I can't think of a worse way to teach that than with newspaper obituaries.

That penultimate paragraph raises a point I believe needs to be raised frequently: Not only haven't our brains been permanently rewired, but neither have those of the next generation. "The students seem to crave offline reading of important books." Not all of them, maybe more at a private liberal arts college, but some of them, some of the time.

That positive note is as good a place to end this installment as any.

Masthead

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ10i3.pdf