Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Sponsored by the Library Society of the World (LSW)

Volume 10, Number 8: July 2010 ISSN 1534-0937 Walt Crawford

The CD-ROM Project
Starting the Dig

For those FriendFeeders who wondered about the "digital medium archaeology project" I mentioned earlier this spring: this is it. I reviewed title CD-ROMs (CD-ROMs as extended books or multimedia objects, as opposed to CD-ROMs as carriers for software) from 1994 through 2000 in *Database* (which became *EContent*), *CD-ROM Professional* (which disappeared) and *Library Hi Tech News*. How many did I review? *At least* 165, including only those that got full write-ups; probably more than 200 in all. I kept some of the better title CD-ROMs—somewhere between 60 and 65 titles.

Some title CD-ROMs (and a few DVD-ROMs) were the extended books of the 1990s. Others were multimedia exploration spaces. Still others had different roles. Libraries have generally not thrown away books published from 1994 through 2000 unless they weren't being used, and that's also true for audio CDs. I suspect the years have been less kind to title CD-ROMs in libraries and elsewhere.

I thought it would be interesting to see how these discs fare 10 to 16 years later. Specifically:

- Will the CD-ROM load and run under Windows 7 without employing compatibility technology?
- How does it perform—does it still seem worthwhile?
- What did I have to say about it when it was new? (In most cases, I had a formal rating.)
- Is some version of this title still available?
- Is there a replacement for it on the web? If not, have we lost anything significant?

I'm going into this blind. I thought the reviews were even older than they are—but still, they were all done *before* Windows for home PCs became an actual operating system (that is, while Windows was still a graphical interface running on MS-DOS), and even the most recent are a decade old. I'm taking titles more-or-less at random, from two stacks of discs and six boxes on a bookcase.

I know my current public library still has a fair selection of CD-ROMs. I suspect many others do. Maybe they're still valuable? Maybe not?

So, here we go...

RedShift 3

RedShift is a virtual planetarium designed to display "the sky from almost any place and any time." The primary program opens a window onto the sky and provides a set of controls to zoom in or out, position yourself as a viewer (on Earth or almost anywhere else "within 9999 astronomical units of the Sun"), move around the sky, change the time (between 4999 BC and 9999 AD), determine what appears (including constellation outlines if desired) and find out more about given objects in the sky.

Inside This Issue

There are also quite a few astronomy tours, some with narration; a set of animations making up the story of the universe; a dictionary of astronomy (heavily hyperlinked); a substantial photo gallery; and more. The package—a traditional title CD-ROM cardboard longbox, 9"x10"x2"—includes the CD-ROM itself (with 660MB of data), a 95-page user's guide and a registration card. I received it as one of the Codie Award nominees for 1998. At the time, it sold for $50 and was a Maris production, distributed by Piranha Interactive.

Installation and operation

The good news: It installs under Windows 7. The only difficulty is that it requires QuickTime (re-

member Apple and non-proprietary standards?)—and will accept no substitute, such as Windows MediaPlayer to play .mov files. (Best guess: It has no way of testing for file associations.) So I had to install a *very* old version of QuickTime—or, rather, a QuickTime plug-in for Internet Explorer (and *only* Internet Explorer).

The better news: It works under Windows 7—and, by and large, works pretty well. I could move the planetarium window (running RedShift's simulation engine) to my larger display and maximize it; support windows (usually small and self-sizing) could stay on the secondary display. Tours that use the simulation engine did use the full display, albeit somewhat choppily; movies ran in a fixed 320x320 (I think) window, and some introductory material ran in a fixed 640x480 window. As with many well-designed CD-ROMs of the time—back when disk storage was at a premium—RedShift primarily runs from the CD-ROM, with about 5MB installed on the hard disk.

I'm not a stargazer, but I'd say the program is still a worthwhile planetarium and the tours, movies and dictionaries are still useful. The photo gallery was great for its time, but 800 relatively small pictures don't seem so impressive in 2010.

What I said in 1998

My review appears in the June/July 1999 *DATABASE*, but I wrote the review in November 1998 as part of an article on 1999 Codie nominees. I gave the disc a 94 rating (well into the Excellent range). RedShift was established as "the premier astronomical CD-ROM in the marketplace" and this was "an absolutely first-rate disc." For its time, the video was first-rate, the sound was "astonishing" (CD-quality stereo, almost unheard of for a 1998 CD-ROM) and the text was "readable, if not ideal."

I thought it was "an excellent purchase for almost any public library, and probably worth your own time and money if you have any interest in astronomy." I probably spent eight or ten hours exploring the original disc; I could imagine spending much more than that if I was more of a stargazer. (By the way, it won a Codie.)

Where are we now?

Remarkably, RedShift 3 is still available—albeit from a different distributor (Viva Media) and probably without the printed manual (since the weight at Amazon is 2.4oz). It sells for $16.99. There also seems to be a Microsoft version for $6. It's a little confusing...

Maris does have a website—noting that Piranha went bankrupt and, in the process, the domain for RedShift users to obtain updates was acquired by a pornography site. Ah, but there's also RedShift 7 at www.redshift-live.com, with several versions available as downloads or on DVD-ROM, at prices from $20 to $80. (The site's German but you can select an English version.) The newer versions appear to have much more and newer content, as you'd expect over ten years and with the move to DVD-ROM.

Can you just use the free web to get the same views? Maybe. I see several virtual planetaria on the web, some of them fairly impressive. I see alternative software for purchase. Certainly, far more dramatic images of objects in space are available now from NASA and other agencies.

What have we lost?

Nothing—partly because the original is still available (at a much lower price) and still works, partly because there are newer (and presumably better) versions, partly because both planetaria and, particularly space imagery take such good advantage of web resources.

RedShift has sold more than a million copies over the years. I suspect there's still room for it alongside newer resources. If your library still has a copy? There's more life in that 12-year-old CD than I would have expected.

Astronomy: An Immersive Journey through the Universe

And now for something entirely different—or not so much. This one's a "Compton's Learning" 2-CD jewelbox (no printed manual) from The Learning Company, copyright 1999—just a little newer than RedShift 3. Ah, but on the back cover is a Maris logo...and on the front is the RedShift logo.

In other words, it's a rebranded version of RedShift sold under another name through another distributor—with the Codie Award seal, for that matter. There is a PDF manual, 211 pages—and that manual is explicitly labeled RedShift 3. So it's fair to assume this is pretty much the same program as on the other disc, albeit with a second CD (with about 166MB of data).

I can't tell you for sure because the setup was blocked by McAfee for attempting to install mal-

ware. Real malware? I don't know and I didn't choose to find out. The odd thing is that the blocked item was from a function I had explicitly unchecked. My guess is most cautious Windows 7 users will not bypass a security warning suggesting that a ten-year-old CD-ROM is about to do something that could damage their system. I know I won't.

Oddly enough, I never reviewed this disc (as far as I can tell). Chances are, it would get a very similar review to RedShift 3, since it appears to be the same program.

This one's apparently still available—maybe. Amazon lists three sellers (*not* including Amazon itself) at $21 and up. For all I know, the supposed malware may not be problematic at all...but since the *real* RedShift 3 is cheaper, I wouldn't bother finding out.

Great Artists

This one's *old*. I reviewed it, very briefly, in the July 1996 *CD-ROM Professional* as one of five Cambrix-distributed discs. It was published in 1994. I called it a "keeper." It was produced by ATTICA Cybernetics and Marshall Cavendish Ltd., in association with the National Gallery, London. Here's the writeup in its entirety:

> Another Cambrix keeper, *Great Artists*, looks at 40 major European artists with one key painting for each artist. The interface is clear, obvious, and workable. There are several different ways of approaching a surprisingly large volume of materials: half a million words of text, several hundred illustrations, 40 lectures, and a few video clips. All text is crystal-clear *serif* on a cream-colored background.
>
> The disc includes clear search facilities as well as a history of screens visited. There are supposedly hypertext definitions for words in red, although that feature didn't run on my system. "Multimedia" is limited but effective, and workshop tools let you explore the 40 paintings in considerable detail, even zooming in to see brushstrokes. The presentation would not work as well in book, videotape or other form; it's a natural for CD-ROM. If not great art in and of itself, *Great Artists* is nonetheless a clear winner, even with some bugs, and a keeper.

The years have not been as kind to *Great Artists* as I was. The CD-ROM *does* install—sort of (copying a handful of files to its own directory), but the results of that installation aren't obvious (which may have to do with ambiguous install options). When you run it, it wants to install Video for Windows—a very old version that "won't run on Windows NT" (which is to say, won't run on *any* Windows from XP onward!). After that error message (the attempt is repeated each time you start the program), the program *does* start anyway.

In a fixed, unmovable, small window (maybe 640x480, maybe smaller) in the top left hand corner of your primary screen. No Windows methodology at all; the only way to exit is an Exit symbol on the Home screen.

Within that window—which, on modern systems, seems pretty tiny—most things work. Sort of. The videos won't play (no surprise there); I didn't encounter any audio lectures (they're definitely on the CD-ROM, but I apparently didn't trigger them or the triggers don't work); most of the workshop tools either work badly or not at all (some interesting ones require you to run in 256-color mode—remember 256-color mode?); the zoom feature appears to be a fixed zoom for one prechosen portion of each painting. The only functional multimedia, other than pictures, is the period-appropriate music that plays on each screen chosen from a timeline...until you choose one of the options, at which point it stops. All in all, while there's doubtless still a lot of material here, I can't imagine anybody spending much time in that little fixed window with its desire for substandard graphics. Time has passed this one by—although the ideas are still excellent.

Availability and equivalences

A search shows what appears to be the same CD-ROM or a newer version from Attica Cybernetics. At $100, unless it's vastly improved it's wildly overpriced. (As far as I can tell, it's the same thing—I can see no verifiable references to anything newer than 1995.)

Is there a website with comparable value? A superficial set of searches doesn't yield anything *directly* comparable, and some of the exploratory tools would require more than a simple web browser—for example, the tool that lets you vary the saturation of each RGB color to see its effects on a painting.

On the other hand...the National Gallery's own website (nationalgallery.org.uk) includes excellent methods to browse, locate and explore more than 2,000 paintings, almost certainly including the 40 on the CD-ROM. You can find them by artist or through a timeline and, for each

one, get a description, key facts, an artist biography and a high-quality image with one level of zoom (but you can move the zoomed area). While not having those workshop tools or videos or lectures, this *free* site offers vastly more information on 50 times as many artworks. We may have lost something since 1994, but what we've gained is immensely more valuable and usable.

For its day, this CD-ROM was groundbreaking. I suspect the last appearance of the CD-ROM was in a five-CD-ROM bundle of art-related discs, the kind of bundle that appeared frequently in the late 1990s/early 2000s as companies tried to make something of the remains of the many bankrupt and disappeared publishers. It was an interesting way to explore, but probably too deliberate and certainly too limited for today's market. What's left here isn't worth keeping.

ArtRageous!

This art-related CD-ROM is of the same vintage (1995) and is also about exploring art, but where *Great Artists* is somber and lecture-oriented, *ArtRageous!* is deliberately a little over the top. I *loved* it when I reviewed it in the June/July 1997 *Database*, giving it a 97, one of the highest ratings I've ever given. *ArtRageous!* puts you in a plaza leading to several vaguely bizarre neighborhoods, with an easel displaying commentary from an odd character. Neighborhoods include Color, Light, Perspective, Composition, Life of Art and Database—and the first five offer ways to explore aspects of that topic. For its day, this CD-ROM was a little more demanding: While *Great Artists* would run on a 16MHz 386, this required a Pentium and at least a quad-speed CD-ROM drive. "I found myself learning about art even as I was playing, and spent *much* more time on this disc than intended."

Ah, but that was then. How does it stand up 14 years later?

That's easy: It doesn't. Although the install screen (a movable Windows screen) comes up—and doesn't seem to require an actual install—any attempt to *run* the program yields a general protection fault. Just not going to happen. It's designed for Windows 95 and Windows 3.1—it's not going to run on Windows 7 without special virtualization or compatibility trickery.

You can still buy *ArtRageous* from some obscure vendors (I see it for $4.99, factory-sealed jewel case) but it's the same old product, I suspect. (Hmm. This description says it only needs a 25MHz 486SX and double-speed CD-ROM...or a 25MHz 68030-based Mac with System 7.1 or later. I'm guessing it won't work much better on a contemporary Mac.)

Maybe you *can* find ways to make it run—I see an odd gaming review from 2007—but I'm not ready to try to find loopholes. One vendor of a 15-year-old CD-ROM says it runs on Windows XP. That might be true, but I'd be a little suspicious...

Online equivalent? It seems unlikely. I found this playful approach to understanding art useful, but I suspect it's no great loss.

The Zeitgeist
One Facebook to Rule Them All?

I'm guessing most readers have (or had) Facebook accounts. I'm also guessing most readers have become at least vaguely aware of Facebook's recent steps to encourage you to be more public—whether you're interested or not.

It's probably not as much of a debacle as Google's buzzkill, even though it affects a lot more people. A cynic would say it's just another reminder that whatever you do on the web is effectively public, and I think that's simplistic. A realist might say it's not at all surprising—and it should remind us that "semi-public" is a tricky thing.

When the early-2010 FB changes hit the fan, I rechecked my own privacy settings and changed whatever needed to be changed—but I've *never* included much in my profile, I've been fairly consistent in not Liking, Joining, using Apps, joining games or doing much else that would expose my email contacts or otherwise expand my circle, and *I'm not everybody else* (or anybody else).

This piece isn't primarily my analysis of what FB did, what it means and where it might go. This is a Zeitgeist piece—notes from other people, some of them librarians, with comments along the way. It's not all about the latest issue: The first segment includes relevant items that predate the latest brouhaha. I sometimes use FB as shorthand for Facebook and FF as shorthand for FriendFeed (not, in this case, Firefox). I'm aware that FB made changes for the better in late May/early June—see

the last section of the essay. Those changes don't negate the zeitgeist or, really, undo the damage.

Before the Fracas

I'm *much* more active on FriendFeed than on Facebook—indeed, I'm more active on FriendFeed than anywhere else online. That's partly due to the Library Society of the World; it's partly because FriendFeed's threaded conversations and relatively small population suit my style.

Facebook purchased FriendFeed in August 2009. There was a near-immediate flood of FF messages from people who were sure FB was going to shut down FF and who wanted to find somewhere else to go. Some of them left FF. Robert Scoble, king of the deathwatchers, pronounced FF dead. So far, ten months later, FF continues to work just fine, with the added bonus that it hasn't attracted so many new users that it's become cumbersome.

Marshall Kirkpatrick wrote "Facebook Users: Here's What FriendFeed Brings to the Family" on August 10, 2009 at *ReadWriteWeb*. He assumed FB and FF would "influence each other a lot." So far, I think nearly all the influence has been in one direction: FF features showing up in FB. That's all Kirkpatrick is talking about—five FF features he assumes will show up in FB:

- He says FF is "very public. Everyones' profiles and postings on the site are public..."—and assumed this would spread to FB. Except *he's wrong*: you can have private feeds on FF, such that only people you specifically authorize can see your postings—and the profiles don't amount to much anyway. He may be right about the FB implications—but he's wrong on the facts.
- He says FF has "in-depth conversations," and there's some truth to that, depending on your definition of in-depth. Two features of FF make that more likely: The way conversations are displayed—and the fact that any new comment in a conversation pops that conversation back to the top of the last-in/first-out stream. (A third is more mysterious but also interesting: You see comments and conversations from people *you're not following*—as soon as somebody you *are* following adds to the conversation.)
- I guess that parenthetical comment is the third item—"cross group interactions." Here again, Kirkpatrick gets things fundamentally wrong when he says that in Facebook "you connect with people you already knew from real life." Unless you define "knew" in the broadest possible sense, that's not true for many of us—I've accepted dozens of Friend invitations from people I've never heard of, if they're not obvious spammers and have some connection to librarianship. My wife's primary involvement in FB is with a group of genealogical researchers, *none of whom* she's met in real life.
- "Multiple network aggregation"—the "lifestream" aspect of FF, since you can have it pull in content from other networks, including Twitter, blogs and others. (Here again, Kirkpatrick overstates—he assumes Twitter will turn off full access to FF immediately if not sooner, since Twitter "can't be excited about giving their crown jewels to Facebook all the sudden." Hasn't happened yet, certainly not "this afternoon [or] tomorrow morning.")
- Real-time updates—which can be maddening in FF, and which I usually leave off (I run in "pause mode," where the screen only refreshes if you want it to). The big difference: FF *automatically* updates your stream (if you're not in pause mode), where FB is more likely to notify you of new messages.

Did FB move rapidly to incorporate FF goodies? Not so much, but to some extent. Am I surprised that the second commenter assumed FF would just be a pointer to FB? Not at all. Has FF disappeared, been crippled or turned into a pointer to FB? Absolutely not. It may be true that changes to FF have been fewer since the acquisition—and, given the nature of changes at FB, there are some of us who regard that as a very good thing.

How Facebook Ruins Friendships

Elizabeth Bernstein wrote this on August 25, 2009 at the *Wall Street Journal*—and it's an interesting perspective. Here's the start:

> Notice to my friends: I love you all dearly.
>
> But I don't give a hoot that you are "having a busy Monday," your child "took 30 minutes to brush his teeth," your dog "just ate an ant trap" or you want to "save the piglets." And I really, really don't care which Addams Family member you most resemble. (I could have told you the answer before you took the quiz on Facebook.)

> Here's where you and I went wrong: We took our friendship online...

Bernstein notes that online networking *has* made people closer in some ways and has allowed people to get back in touch with long-lost friends (and enemies and stalkers...)—but online interactions can hurt real-life relationships.

> Like many people, I'm experiencing Facebook Fatigue. I'm tired of loved ones—you know who you are—who claim they are too busy to pick up the phone, or even write a decent email, yet spend hours on social-media sites, uploading photos of their children or parties, forwarding inane quizzes, posting quirky, sometimes nonsensical one-liners or tweeting their latest whereabouts. ("Anyone know a good restaurant in Berlin?")

She sees in FB statuses what I used to see in Twitter: Too much typing, too little interesting content. She checked her FB page and found that three "pals" had the same status update: "Zzzzz." She thinks we're chattering more and not saying much interesting—breaking the rule "Thou Shalt Not Bore Thy Friends." One person labels the trend narcissism and finds it maddening. Others wonder why people feel compelled to post about the meal they just ate, or are eating, or want to eat, when they'd certainly never call friends on the phone to say "I just ate a Frito pie." That's not just FB, of course—it was the old knock on Twitter and I see more than enough FF messages (admittedly, mostly *from* Twitter) that seem equally...maybe narcissistic is the right word.

Bernstein also notes the TMI phenomenon, although she doesn't use the phrase itself—e.g., it's one thing to find out that an old friend or colleague has a sexual orientation you didn't know about; it's another to see the friend joining numerous unusual groups...or posting status updates when drunk and doing something regrettable. There are also issues of jealousy, taking longer to get over relationships, passive-aggressive behavior and more.

I know the feeling, although my own use of FB is so limited that it's not a big deal for me. I've done an enormous amount of Hiding in FF (I *really* don't care what you just heard on Pandora, what you've added to your Netflix queue, etc., etc.)—to the point where I get 15-20 "unseen" messages for every 30 that I see. Even so, there are cases where I ponder whether I should unfollow somebody—or, worse, block them, since that's the only way to hide cases where your other friends Like the comments you're tired of seeing.

The answer? Well, you could leave FB and all the other social networking sites—or, as Bernstein says, you could change your own conduct. Post when you have something to say—and respond to others only when they're doing the same. Sure, you'll still have to ignore huge quantities of boring or obnoxious stuff, but (for most of us) there's enough benefit to social networking that this is a reasonable tradeoff.

It does make you realize, though, why some of the best stories involving telepathy view it as a horrible thing unless tightly focused: What if you really *could* pick up all the thoughts of people within a one-mile radius? Would you really want to?

The comments—251 of them—are, well, the comments. The very first one seems to be saying that the article itself is pointless and, at 1,378 words, far too long. One group (comment and replies) disagrees fundamentally, asserting that things like posting about the meal you just ate makes people "more real" and has changed the way we communicate for the better. Several people call Bernstein's piece a "rant"—which isn't the way it reads to me, but I also don't find 1,400 words too long. *Of course* we're informed that Bernstein *doesn't get it*. And probably should leave FB, because trivia is the *whole point* of FB. I'm always impressed by people who take the time to add a comment saying an article is useless, with no other comment: I guess that boils down to "Damn, I'm important, so I have to say something here even though I have nothing to say." There's one that really blew me away: "If you think your friends' posts are boring, they might not really be your friends." How can you respond to something like that?

Nobody Goes There Anymore

You know the old joke: "That club's too popular—nobody goes there anymore." A couple of pieces, long before the current FB situation, made a similar claim about FB. Think of this section as a little humor.

Virginia Heffernan wrote "Facebook Exodus" on August 30, 2009 in the New York *Times Magazine*. Here's the lead paragraph:

> Things fall apart; the center cannot hold. Facebook, the online social grid, could not command loyalty forever. If you ask around, as I did, you'll find quitters. One person shut down her account because she disliked how nosy it made her. Another thought the scene had turned desperate. A third feared stalkers. A fourth believed his pri-

> vacy was compromised. A fifth disappeared without a word.

OMG! *Five people* left FB! Heffernan admits "the exodus is not evident from the site's overall numbers" (ya' think?) but says "a small but noticeable group are fleeing—some of them ostentatiously." And, presumably, **slamming the door** on their way out. (Remember: This article was considered worth running in the New York *Times Magazine*—it should presumably be something other than pure filler. Or is that a mistake on my part?)

One FB user now "crusades against it" and agrees with his mother's snap judgment, "Facebook is the devil." We hear of *waves* of disillusionment with FB—not only doesn't anybody go there now, they've stopped going several times already!

In an overwhelming flood of anecdata, Heffernan notes one friend who found FB a waste of time and another who left for reasons "he won't discuss." Some just stop going—you know, like the 94% of people who start blogs and give them up or, for that matter, the high percentage of Twitter "users" who never tweet. (Nobody blogs anymore either; that's a different article.) A "prolific and eloquent Facebook updater" now prefers Twitter and says Facebook feels dead.

> Is Facebook doomed to someday become an online ghost town, run by zombie users who never update their pages and packs of marketers picking at the corpses of social circles they once hoped to exploit? Sad, if so. Though maybe fated, like the demise of a college clique.

It's all over—FB goes on the deathwatch. I think Heffernan came up with *five* people who left—except one of them hasn't, really. I'm convinced: Turn out the lights, switch off the servers, the party's over.

Comments amusing as ever—including "John" who wrote a *362-word comment* on why "these models" (FB and its ilk) "offer nothing of any real value" and that he's said "a thousand times" FB will shrink.

At which point I almost feel the need to say: *I stopped using Twitter and deleted my account*. Therefore Twitter is dead and everybody's stopped using it. Right? Oh, and I did that more than a year ago, so Twitter's ancient history. Right? And I bet I can find five other people who also stopped tweeting—can I get an article published about that and be paid *NYT* wordrates?

Chiming in from *The Atlantic*, Benjamin F. Carlson offered "Quitting Social Media" on August 31, 2009. He points to the Heffernan piece and a claim by business analysts that Twitter is "about to hit a wall" (because teens don't use it as much as older users). To be fair, Carlson's looking at the whole picture. To Heffernan's claim, he counters that social media growth is surging (citing a venture capitalist); to the claim that FB is a "worthless professional tool" he counters Clive Thompson's odd claim that social networking and the need for brevity is ushering in a golden age of literacy, teaching "young people to deploy haiku-like concision." Haiku-like? ROFLMAO! He quotes Geoff Cook in the Washington *Post*:

> The question of "Why Don't Teens Use Twitter?" is the question of "Why Doesn't Everyone Use Twitter?" The answer, it would seem, is both obvious and heretical: maybe Twitter isn't for everyone.

Sure, that's Twitter, not FB—but it may be the same message. To which I'd add: And sometimes you find out that a social network that *used* to make sense for you no longer does. *That's you*—people (should) change; it's not (inherently) the network.

Jumping forward a bit, here's Russell Smith on Wednesday, January 27, 2010, offering "Social-media suicide" at *The Globe and Mail*—with the teaser "I'm joining Facebook just as the cool kids are leaving." He's joining FB because he's been missing invitations and announcements that only show up on FB:

> Cutting yourself off from this dominant communication system is like living in the country and demanding that all your friends go out of their way to visit you. Not participating in mindless online social networks now is like not having a telephone 20 years ago.

There is a word in that last sentence that should clue you in to Smith not being entirely happy about joining FB, but he's mostly talking about the countertrend: he's joining "just as it becomes trendy to announce that one is leaving social networking behind. Yes, that's what all the cool kids are doing: They are killing off their virtual personas." He says the trend is called online suicide. The rest of the column is about sites that offer to remove all of your social-network accounts—and steps taken by FB to prevent those sites from working. Not that any of this matters. His close:

> How this legal tiff is resolved is not in the least important to Facebook, or even to the purpose of the

> websites that called for the annihilation of the online social persona. They have made their point, and made people think about social networking in a new way. Their agitprop function has been accomplished. They'll probably move on to another subject in no time. On a more basic level, Facebook had won this from the beginning: It's still so powerful that poor resistant saps like me have to buckle under and subscribe, just to feel a part of the world.

Lovely.

Facebook—just HOW rude and patronising can you get?

A short but pungent note from Phil Bradley at his eponymous blog on October 25, 2009. He noticed something over at the top right. Under the "Suggested Friends" heading was one case where Person X and Bradley have four mutual friends, and FB suggested adding X as a friend. But the second one, for Person Y, is the killer: "She only has 14 friends. Suggest Friends for her."

Bradley's restrained and low-key about this:

> WTF do you think you're playing at Facebook? It's not up to you to comment on the number of friends that someone has or has not got - and if this person just wants 14 friends maybe that's all that she wants? That Facebook should be making the point that I or anyone should suggest friends for her is rude and arrogant in the extreme. That attitude that someone is 'less' than anyone else because of the friends that they have or don't have is something I wouldn't expect to see out of a primary school, and I certainly don't expect to see it on a social networking site. "Poor so-and-so, she's only got 14 friends you know" is a disgusting and patronising way to treat your users. I would really suggest rethinking your approach here.

With one exception, commenters all agreed. The exception suggested that FB's thing was "a very sweet gesture" and ended their comment with four exclamation points, which may say it all. One or two cited an odd feature that occasionally notes that you haven't talked to someone in a while and suggests that you do so—*really?*

Facebook and Twitter Will Always Be Crappy Businesses

Not directly relevant, but we need a break here and there: Bo Peabody's long-for-a-post piece on February 1, 2010 at *Business Insider*. He explains why (in his expert opinion as a venture capitalist) FB, Twitter and *any* social networking business are doomed to be "crappy businesses"—unlike "content networks."

Why? Because advertisers are risk-averse and tightly controlled content networks can be much less "risky" than social networks. He calls social networks *dangerous places* for advertisers—and, as we all know, the only source of revenue for anything online is advertising. Right?

> To create a compelling and safe environment for an advertiser requires that content be controlled and organized so that the advertisement itself can be targeted properly and, perhaps more importantly, so there is no chance that the brand being advertised will be associated with something it did not intend to associate with. There is very little control or organization on social networks; I can post whatever I want whenever I want, whether a written word, a spoken word, a picture, or a video. Only the most rudimentary restrictions apply to what content can be posted on a social network and even those are flouted all the time. This presents two problems for advertisers. First, it's impossible to target an ad properly because it's impossible to know with any specificity or certainty what content is on a social network. I could be talking about health one moment and NASCAR the next, or about Dale Earnhardt Junior's health. Second, the content is amateurish at best and offensive at worst. There is no way a brand can be sure it's going to be associated with content that is consistent with the message it wants to send to its audience.

There's a lot more—for example, Peabody's assertion that people use the web either to find information or to find people, which seems a little narrow. What you may need to know is an item in Peabody's vita: He was the founder of Tripod (and some "content" sites). Tripod never established a real business model. Therefore, nothing that looks a little (a *very* little) like Tripod can possibly do so. Sounds right to me. Heck, Orkut was a failure in the U.S., therefore Facebook is a failure—after all, if Google can't do it, nobody can. Right?

Getting There

The big changes in FB started in November-December 2009, although the full furor didn't arise until April 2010. Kevin Bankston wrote "Facebook's New Privacy Changes: The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly" on December 9, 2009 at EFF's Deeplinks blog. The set of changes at that point were intended to simplify Facebook's settings and "give you more control of your information"—or were they?

> These new "privacy" changes are clearly intended to push Facebook users to publicly share even more

> information than before. Even worse, the changes will actually reduce the amount of control that users have over some of their personal data.

What EFF thought good in the changes: A reduction in the overall number of settings (and elimination of regional networks); per-post privacy settings; "forcing" users to pay attention to privacy settings. (Really?)

The bad: FB's recommended settings were far too public. Before, there *was* no "everyone" setting.

> Facebook will justify the new push for more sharing with everyone by pointing to the new per-post privacy options—if you don't want to share a particular piece of content with everyone, Facebook will argue, then just set the privacy level for that piece of content to something else. But we think the much safer option is to do the reverse: set your general privacy default to a more restrictive level, like "Only Friends," and then set the per-post privacy to "Everyone" for those particular things that you're sure you want to share with the world.

The ugly? Here's the boldface subhead and first paragraph:

> **Information That You Used to Control Is Now Treated as "Publicly Available," and You Can't Opt Out of The "Sharing" of Your Information with Facebook Apps**
>
> Looking even closer at the new Facebook privacy changes, things get downright ugly when it comes to controlling who gets to see personal information such as your list of friends. Under the new regime, Facebook treats that information — along with your name, profile picture, current city, gender, networks, and the pages that you are a "fan" of—as "publicly available information" or "PAI." Before, users were allowed to restrict access to much of that information. Now, however, those privacy options have been eliminated. For example, although you used to have the ability to prevent everyone but your friends from seeing your friends list, that old privacy setting...has now been removed completely from the privacy settings page.

There's quite a bit more in the "ugly" section. Bankston says "we at EFF are worried that today's changes will lead to Facebook users publishing to the world much more information about themselves than they ever intended."

Is it possible to opt out of social networking?

"Jono at Mozilla Labs" (Jono DiCarlo) asked that question on February 6, 2010 at *Not the User's Fault*. DiCarlo had chosen not to participate in FB, not being much for social networks in general. Coworkers told him he ought to at least try "the modern Facebook" (he'd used it in university-only days). I'm quoting much of this because it's instructive—and I think you *forget* the initial shock shortly after you've started using FB:

> So I went to Facebook and started creating an account. I entered my first and last name and email address, and Facebook showed me a page saying "We think these people might be your friends". There were several dozen people there who I actually know, mixed in with several dozen who I don't.
>
> Wait a minute, How *does Facebook know who my friends are??* Remember, I hadn't told them anything except an email address at this point. I was disturbed by how much they knew about me. More than disturbed. I was *freaked out*.
>
> Where did this information come from? From the old account that I deleted? Unlikely. I believe it came from my friends importing their email contacts into Facebook. My email address was in their contact lists, so Facebook looked it up in their database and, not finding me, stored a sort of "dangling pointer". This pointer laid dormant until I entered a matching email address, at which point it sprang into action...
>
> The part that disturbs me about all this is that Facebook had my email address in their database, without my knowledge or consent, despite my decision not to use their service.
>
> And they had a lot more than my email address. They had pictures of me, uploaded by my friends and tagged with my name. They knew who my friends were. They knew what my friends liked. They knew more or less how I would fit into their social network. If they wanted to, they could deduce a lot of information about the person behind the email address. It would have been fairly trivial for them to figure out what school I went to, about how old I am, what political activities I have been involved in, and what advertisers would be most interested in reaching my demographic.
>
> My friends did not ask my permission before giving Facebook all this information about me. Why would they? There is no UI warning, no legal terms, no moral or cultural expectation that they should do so. They just typed in their own email password and clicked "Find Friends".
>
> Facebook makes money through targeted advertising. They profit from the detailed information that they extract from their extensive social network database. I was part of that database despite my choice not to participate. It's not too much of a stretch to say that they have been profiting off of me, without my knowledge or consent, using in-

> formation about me that was given away by my friends, again without my knowledge or consent.

DiCarlo doesn't target FB specifically; he thinks what they're doing is "pretty much standard practice in the industry"—but FB is the biggest player.

> I want to be able to choose what information about myself I make available on the Internet. I want to be able to control how that information is used. And if I make a choice not to participate in an organization or do business with a company, then I don't want that organization or company storing information about me.

There are 47 comments. One person thinks he's overreacting because there's lots of information already out there on the web—"What Facebook did was merely cross reference it, organize it, and make it easily accessible." This person says transparency is good, approvingly quotes Eric Schmidt's obnoxious "If you have something that you don't want anyone to know, maybe you shouldn't be doing it in the first place"—then signs off anonymously. (Several others disagree or at least say that reality's a little more complex than that.) One person goes so far as to say that *no* information entered into a web browser, even in SSL mode, is private—a startling claim. Another person, signing a full name and *admitting* to have not read the article, comes up with a truly bizarre confusion of the real world and an online world in which you're intimately connected with 400 million other people:

> Isn't it a fact, that your friends talk about you without you knowing that they talk about you!? How drunk you were last night. How bad you danced. And that they tried to hook you up with a nice girl and you blew it by talking about how MSFT of today is the IBM of the 80's!
>
> This is life.

Others seem to follow the same lines: Because *your friends* may say things about you that you'd rather they not say, it's OK—*and no different*—for a social network to spread stuff about you. One commenter had a great indirect response to this:

> It's a little absurd to say, 'the information was always available; there's really no difference because it's more easily available.' First, disparaging the value of accessibility and discoverability is a little odd for software developers. Second, it ignores the value of technology; it's like saying:
>
> "You could always travel NY to Los Angeles; the fact that you once had to do it by horse and now can do it by plane, really hasn't changed anything." But it has.

The Man Who Looked Into Facebook's Soul

Another Marshall Kirkpatrick article at *ReadWriteWeb*, posted February 8, 2010. Pete Warden, who used to work at Apple, had been crawling public profile pages on FB and uploading "100GB of user data" onto his server to make it available for academic research. While he's removed profile URLs, he's kept "names, locations, Fan page lists and partial Friends lists." All available for any academic to mine at will...because Warden is "fascinated by how we can build tools to understand our world and connect people based on all the data we're just littering the Internet with."

My first thought: How does Warden assure that only *academic* researchers will have access to this data, replete as it is with names and addresses? (The article doesn't address that...after all, it's *RWW*, so the **ooh, shiny** of bigger and better social graph analysis is the main focus.) I do see that he's not *just* giving it away—he's focused on "working on ways of presenting all this information in a form that answers questions for people willing to pay."

Is there an issue? Well, these are public profiles. Do people assume "public" means not only that anybody can see them...but that they will be aggregated and cross-referenced at will? Probably not, and maybe they should. Does it matter? As it turns out, not in this case—and maybe not for the right reasons.

Why not? Because the dataset's gone, according to an April 5, 2010 post *by* Pete Warden at *PeteSearch*: "How I got sued by Facebook." He summarizes his project, notes steps he took to publicize it—and the result: a cell-phone call from a Facebook attorney. Even though Warden had followed robots.txt instructions, FB apparently contended they could *still* sue you for crawling the site. The attorney demanded—and got—assurance that Warden would not publish the data. Warden was required to destroy the dataset. The final paragraph:

> I'm just glad that the whole process is over. I'm bummed that Facebook are taking a legal position that would cripple the web if it was adopted (how many people would Google need to hire to write letters to every single website they crawled?), and a bit frustrated that people don't understand that the data I was planning to release is already in the hands of lots of commercial marketing firms, but mostly I'm just looking forward to leaving the massive distraction of a legal threat behind and

> getting on with building my startup. I really appreciate everyone's support, stay tuned for my next project!

It's never that simple. A comment says that FB has a clearly-posted Acceptable Use Policy that forbids scraping, and what Warden was doing was an awful lot like scraping.

Dear Facebook, I Would Like My Illusion of Privacy Back, K, Thanks*

That's Bobbi L. Newman on February 11, 2010 at *Librarian by Day*. She's commenting on an update that removed users' ability to turn off a recent activity feed:

> Now everything you do posts to your wall and the news feed. You can not opt out. If you don't like it Facebook says you're welcome to use the "Remove" button.
>
> Great except there is no "remove" button on any mobile version of Facebook and it's a pain in the you-know-what to delete all of my activity every time I'm active on Facebook.

I suspect Newman is fairly typical in some ways: She grumbles every time FB makes an "improvement" (her appropriate scare quotes) but "I adjust pretty quickly and move on"—but not this time. FB changed to using the privacy of the content in general, not a specific piece. "Yeah great, but WHY?... What possible benefit am I missing to removing my option to check a little box that allows me the illusion of privacy?"

That asterisk in the title? The last paragraph, in italics:

> **yes I know that just by having a Facebook page I don't really have any privacy, but the ability to hide my recent activity makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside.*

The Storm

Kurt Opsahl explains it on April 19, 2010 at EFF's *Deeplinks*: "Facebook Further Reduces Your Control Over Personal Information." Opsahl cites one early version of FB's privacy policy: "No personal information that you submit to Facebook will be available to any user of the Web Site who does not belong to at least one of the groups specified by you in your privacy settings."

> How times have changed.
>
> Today, Facebook removed its users' ability to control who can see their own interests and personal information. Certain parts of users' profiles, "including your current city, hometown, education and work, and likes and interests" will now be transformed into "connections," meaning that they will be shared publicly. If you don't want these parts of your profile to be made public, your only option is to delete them.

So you include "cooking" as an interest on your profile? Well, now, there's a new Cooking page—that lists you and everybody else including cooking as an interest. Harmless enough, to be sure... "Of course, the new program will also create public lists for controversial issues, such as an interest in abortion rights, gay marriage, marijuana, tea parties and so on."

Opsahl finds that the change benefits Facebook and business partners—but probably not users. After the December "privacy degradations" resulted in lots of outrage, FB came partway back..and might do so again, *if enough people complain*. (In an update, Opsahl clarifies that the problem with the new feature is not that you can't opt-out—it's that you can *only* opt-out by removing the interest from your profile entirely. Facebook Pages you connect to are public, period.)

By this time, people were getting concerned: FB seemed to be opening things they thought were closed and turning opt-in into opt-out.

To leave...or not to leave

Dan Yoder at *rocket.ly* posted "Top Ten Reasons You Should Quit Facebook" on April 26, 2010 and "Why You Should Still Quit Facebook" on May 5, 2010. *rocket.ly* isn't an enormously high-profile—but that first post struck a nerve. Yoder says he's decided to delete his FB account and would like to encourage others to do the same—because he thinks FB is unethical and he'd like his own social network to migrate away from it. (He links to an April 23, 2010 on the European version of *TechCrunch* claiming Google engineers are leaving FB "in droves"—said droves apparently adding up to ten people.) His ten reasons without his commentary minus #9 (because it's potentially slanderous):

> 10. Facebook's Terms Of Service are completely one-sided.
>
> 8. Facebook has flat out declared war on privacy.
>
> 7. Facebook is pulling a classic bait-and-switch. (Telling developers how to access your data with new APIs, but being quiet about explaining the implications.)
>
> 6. Facebook is a bully. (They sued, or threatened to sue, Pete Warden—see earlier.)

5. Even your private data is shared with applications.

4. Facebook is not technically competent enough to be trusted.

3. Facebook makes it incredibly difficult to truly delete your account.

2. Facebook doesn't (really) support the Open Web.

1. The Facebook application itself sucks.

I won't try to go through 249 comments... Yoder says he was overwhelmed by the response to that post. The followup responds to some common objections to his stance and some of those responses resonate with my pseudo-librarian soul. For example, the first objection and part of his response:

What's the big deal? I don't care if someone has access to my photos or status updates.

Tens of millions of people provided personal information to Facebook with the understanding that this information was being shared only within their social network. Then Facebook changed the rules and this information was unexpectedly shared with perfect strangers. That is, simply stated, a profound invasion of privacy...

Consider the example of the government tapping your phones. You conduct phone conversations thinking that they're just between you and the person you're speaking with. The government can't tap your phone and listen in on the conversation without a warrant. This is because your privacy is a right protected by law.

Now take this example a step further, and suppose your cell phone provider one day sends you an updated privacy policy that states that they can tap your phone any time they want. Would you still use their service? Of course not! And, in fact, they won't do this because it's actually against the law for them to do so...

I haven't even touched on the various reasons people might want to keep these conversations private. They range from the profound, like avoiding workplace discrimination or protecting political dissidents, to the banal, like cheating on your wife or avoiding an abusive husband. But it really doesn't matter. It is not for any of us to decide on behalf of someone else what information should be considered private.

Most people just want control over what they're sharing and with whom...

Of several other objections, the most difficult (and the reason I'm still on FB) is this:

I'd leave except that I have too many family and friends still on there.

This is a tough one. I wrote my original post for exactly this reason—to try and convince them to leave. I felt that by continuing to use Facebook, I was passively endorsing it.

This one, not surprisingly, drew fewer comments (but 40 is still quite a few by my standards!).

David Lee King posted "10 Reasons to NOT Quit Facebook" at his eponymous blog on May 4, 2010. He's focusing on organizational Facebook pages, and isn't sure deleting your library's Profile or Page is a good idea. (Neither am I: almost none of the privacy-and-control issues for individuals apply to libraries and organizations at all, and Yoder said *nothing* about organizations dropping out.) In a way, King's response is orthogonal to the original, but here are his ten reasons (again, without expansion):

Your customers are using Facebook. Your community is on Facebook. Did I mention free marketing? Teach proper privacy protocols. Answer questions. Friend your customers. Say hi to your mom. Don't stop with your Mom—connect with friends and colleagues too. Start conversations. Use Facebook tools to tell Facebook what you think.

Setting aside the unfortunate use of "customers" for patrons, the fourth and fifth suggestions (Teach proper privacy protocols and answer questions) are worthwhile *but have nothing to do with whether you, as a person, should be on FB*. (As for #4, the options seem to change so fast that it would be difficult for any but the biggest libraries to keep up with them.) Otherwise...well, these basically amount to "it doesn't matter how bad it is, it's popular, so you should use it." It's also true that you can't have an organizational page without a personal account—but that account could be a dummy account that has no real personal info but only exists to support the page.

Stephen Abram weighed in with "The Great Privacy Contradiction" on May 7, 2010 at *Stephen's Lighthouse*. He seems to think Dan Yoder might have been writing tongue-in-cheek (really?), cites King's post and says "It'd be humourous if it wasn't so sad in the extension of a problem into a B&W choice instead of a more nuanced solution." Then it gets strange. Abram seems to think that any "information professionals" should *always* be entirely up-to-date on how Facebook's settings work, which is a damn tall order for people with day jobs. And he says this:

It seems to me that publicly advocating exiting Facebook and giving up on learning (and keeping up to date with) the ability to manage and control

> your settings is admitting publicly that your skills as an information professional are inadequate.

First, the cited post that advocates leaving FB *is not from a library person* or "information professional." Second, there's a gulf between saying "I don't know how to manage my settings" and "I think FB's become a bad thing and I'm leaving." I don't remember *any* librarian saying the first, and it's insulting to suggest that leaving FB is an implicit admission of failure. (Abram posted another related item on May 31, 2010; I responded at length in a June 1, 2010 *Walt at Random* post.)

Then Abram goes into reminiscences of when colleagues said they would never get a fax (which some of us never did), never use voicemail, never get an email account... and says he can name "some 'big' library names who declared in writing that the web or blogging were short term fads and would have no relevance to the future of librarianship." I would *love* to see Abram's list of "big" library names who called *the web* a short-term fad with no relevance to the future of librarianship! (As for blogging...well, I'm not among that number, but to some extent it *was* a short-term fad *as a fad* or Shiny New Thing.) The following sentence is even more amusing: "I doubt that they fully realized how that made them appear to others including potential employers who might be looking to fill positions or to current employers who might be looking for whom to cull." I hate to say this, but the only "big" library name I'm aware of who dismissed blogging as pointless was *already* a library director and in his final professional post. It may have been a stupid thing to say, but it sure didn't cost him his job.

Here's the last paragraph:

> I suspect some folks will be annoyed by this post but I felt the need to say what most are too polite to tell people to their faces when they declare their lack of facility with the newer social and information tools.

Yes, Stephen, I'm annoyed by that post—but not *at all* for the reasons you cite. A decision to stop using FB is not a "lack of facility"; it's a decision quite possibly based on serious thought. And no, even if I was an active library professional, I reject the notion that I must learn *every single social service* (Gowalla? Foursquare?) in order to be a professional—and the notion that most people go to librarians to ask about Facebook, for that matter. (I looked up Gowalla. It's a game of sorts, with around 150,000 users. Really? All library professionals are required to be users of, and expert in, *games* with a large handful of users?)

Nancy Baym offered an interesting perspective on "Why, despite myself, I am not leaving Facebook. Yet." in a May 13, 2010 post at *online fandom*. She responds to "criticisms of criticism" of FB that she's hearing. Some of them, with summaries of Baym's response:

> **(1) Twitter's public, where's the rage against Twitter?**
>
> When you sign up for Twitter, there's one big choice—public or private? The difference: FB *changed the rules* for existing users. "Regularly. Repeatedly. And every time they did it required more research to understand what they'd done and more unclicking to preserve the premises they'd offered when I signed up."
>
> **(2) If you think it's so evil, just leave.**
>
> She's thinking about it—but she still gets real value from FB. And it's a copout: People *provide* FB with value by building networks; telling them "if you don't like it, leave" is not an answer.
>
> **(3) Facebook needs to make money.**
>
> She agrees but hasn't been convinced that this is the best (or a necessary) way to do that.
>
> **(4) If you don't want it shared, don't share it.**
>
> A complex response involving marginalized groups, but the statement "completely misses the point. "The willingness to disclose all our data to marketers should not be required to socialize."

So far, she's "fighting the system from within"—blocking ads, removing most connections, wiping out most profile info, locking down settings. But she thinks it's wrong for her to be a "subversive user" and concludes:

> What I want is a Facebook that is premised on a belief that first and foremost human relationships are valuable and sacred, not the ground on which money trees grow, but that if the value of relationships is genuinely nurtured, there will be ways to earn money.
>
> I want a Facebook that really believes that people have a right to select how their information will be shared, instead of a belief that they're too dumb to figure it out if the settings are too confusing so it's okay to dupe them.
>
> I want a Facebook that can find creative ways to make a profit using the rules they originally set for their own game.
>
> I want an ethical Facebook.

That shouldn't be too much to ask.

I'll admit my surprise that neither King nor Abram even *mentioned* ethical issues.

Biomedicine on Display, the blog of the Medical Museion at the University of Copenhagen, had a pithy post on May 16, 2010: "Facebook—just another uncool site." Yes, the institution is on FB, "Not because we love it, but because we follow the siren calls of other museums that believe they need this part of the social media spectrum to be visible online." The person writing the post *hates* FB, both for the way they treat customers and for their business idea, "to commercialise the need of human social interaction." But the title may say it all: As things get worse, FB may lose "its former reputation as a hip online social medium" and turn into "just another MySpace."

CW at *Ruminations* (an Australian librarian) wrote "No more Facebook for me" on May 16, 2010. She deleted her FB account that morning; she couldn't see any reason to stay any longer. So she looked through profiles for the people she really *knew* among her FB "friends," wrote info down where she found it...and dropped out.

> The thing that struck me most while looking over the friends list was that I have been connecting with most of my FB friends in other ways—either using online methods including other social media like Twitter and Flickr, my blog, or email, or in realtime, using the good old face-to-face method. I found that those FB friends I didn't connect with much on FB, I don't connect with elsewhere either. So even though I've written down their email addresses, I don't know if I will be emailing them much anyway. Many of my FB friends would fall into the "acquaintances" category, but I know where they work or have their contact details already, so I didn't bother to go and collect that information again.

Excluding my family and maybe four others, I could say the same. Others would lose a significant social network; for them, the problem is different.

Other Perspectives and Problems

Some people left—probably not many. Other people joined—and I'm nearly certain most of those people didn't take the time to explore the ramifications of FB privacy choices. That's not unusual.

Maybe it's worth going back to a January 9, 2010 Kirkpatrick item at *ReadWriteWeb* to gain background: "Facebook's Zuckerberg Says The Age of Privacy is Over." Zuckerberg was talking with Michael Arrington of TechCrunch:

> When I got started in my dorm room at Harvard, the question a lot of people asked was 'why would I want to put any information on the Internet at all? Why would I want to have a website?'
>
> And then in the last 5 or 6 years, blogging has taken off in a huge way and all these different services that have people sharing all this information. People have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and different kinds, but more openly and with more people. That social norm is just something that has evolved over time.
>
> We view it as our role in the system to constantly be innovating and be updating what our system is to reflect what the current social norms are.
>
> A lot of companies would be trapped by the conventions and their legacies of what they've built, doing a privacy change—doing a privacy change for 350 million users is not the kind of thing that a lot of companies would do. But we viewed that as a really important thing, to always keep a beginner's mind and what would we do if we were starting the company now and we decided that these would be the social norms now and we just went for it.

As the article notes, this is a *radical* change from FB's original assurances—and as recently as 2008, Zuckerberg was quoted as saying privacy control is "the vector around which Facebook operates." Kirkpatrick doesn't buy the explanation and calls it "arrogant and condescending." It is *certainly* absurd to suggest that blogging means people don't care about privacy. (Apparently, another FB executive says privacy doesn't much matter anymore...because of, among other things, the rise of reality TV. So because there are more exhibitionists, we're all exhibitionists now?)

It turns out there's more to the situation than Zuckerberg's changing attitudes and FB's ever-changing settings. In May 2010, Facebook *confirmed* that it has sent usernames of FB members to its advertising partners—a direct violation of its current privacy policy. Oh, it was a mistake, and it's been fixed, but it hardly gives anyone reason to trust FB. EFF thought this was a serious violation—that when you say "**We don't share your information with advertisers. Our targeting is anonymous. We don't identify or share names. Period**." you really shouldn't pass names on to advertisers. Really. If you want a reasonably clear explanation of what this was all about, read

"Understanding the latest Facebook privacy train wreck," an article by Peter Bright at *Ars Technica*. Bright calls it "reckless behavior" and thinks it's distressing: "Privacy is about more than having a bunch of checkboxes you can tick: it needs to be considered for every piece of development, or else these accidental problems will continue to arise." (The content stream is fascinating, including the question of whether "accidental" is the right word.)

Concerned About Facebook? You're Probably Getting Old

The middle-finger salute for this essay *has* to go to this piece by Mike Melanson on May 11, 2010 at *ReadWriteWeb*. His case? "YouGov BrandIndex," a company that measures "consumer perception" (even Melanson finds scare quotes necessary for that), says the "buzz score" for Facebook is falling (slowly) among adults 35+ and rising—rapidly—among adults 18-34.

This is *serious science* here: BrandIndex asks "If you've heard anything about the brand in the last two weeks, was it positive or negative?" and lets you choose a score between +100 and -100. It adds all the points to get an overall "buzz." Among us doddering old fogies 35 and up, the buzz dropped from 26.7 on March 24 to 21.2 on May 7...while it jumped from 32.8 to 44.8 for the young punks.

Melanson pontificates about possible reasons for this disparity, concluding:

> Either way, it seems that Facebook continues to be a dividing line in the debate over online privacy and the battle is drawn among generations.

I have a different conclusion: *It's bullshit*. The question asked doesn't say diddly-squat about the respondent's own attitudes toward the product—only about what they've heard. Second, "being concerned" is not the same as liking or disliking. Third, after reading YouGov's own FAQ, I would question its general applicability in any case.

I won't comment on the notion that being over 34 is "getting old." Technically, it's true; *everybody* is getting old, since the alternative is death.

One commenter felt obliged to offer this almost-certainly-false comment: "The fact is that younger people care much less about their privacy, since they are much more used to their lives being public through social media." That's not a fact, it's gengen—and quite probably false gengen. I'd bet (even if Pew Internet seems to agree) that today's *aware* younger people (many people of any age don't pay much attention) *do* care about privacy. (The very next comment, albeit anecdata, is from a 20-year-old who says 90% of their friends don't use FB that much or have any personal info left on it.)

Adding a Little Nuance

I'm devoting a separate section to comments from danah boyd because she's had a lot of worthwhile things to say on this cluster of topics. But I thought I'd do something I *never* do: Quote from notes on a conference speech and assume the notes actually represent the speaker's thoughts. The notes on boyd's speech are by Bora Zivkovic (who writes carefully and thoughtfully) and appeared in "Public vs. Publicized: Future of the Web at WWW2010," posted May 10, 2010 at *Science in the Triangle*. I *love* the first point he cites—that people are harvesting information from social networks, running it through mathematical models...and then assuming too much about the meaningfulness of the results. (I quietly say "Go danah! I'll keep lowercasing your name if you keep saying things that sensible!") But here's the key:

> There is a difference between Public and Publicized. If you put something online with a hope it will go viral and be seen by as many strangers as possible, you have done broadcasting – what you did was Publicizing. But if you put something online with an unspoken understanding that it is targeted at a relatively limited number of people, usually personal friends (on Facebook) or regular readership (on blogs and Twitter), that is only Public, not Publicized. Taking that kind of stuff posted online by someone and spreading it to a much wider audience of strangers (or using that data for 'scientific research') is a violation of privacy. It is at best unthinking and tone-deaf, at worst unethical.

That's what Facebook did with the change in settings and passthrough—take "public" information and make it Publicized.

Andrew Burkhardt at *Information Tyrannosaur* offers "An Illusion of Privacy (The Facebook Debate)" on May 16, 2010. He cites three perspectives—Robert Scoble's wish for Facebook to be *more open;* danah boyd's belief that people are angry, confused and feel trapped; and Ben Parr's "In Defense of Facebook" at *Mashable*, whose sophisticated argument boils down to "hey, once it's on the web, it's public anyway." Nuance? Not here! Parr has climbed on the "Privacy is dead" dumb-

wagon, where everything is Black or White, with nothing in between. I imagine he would read the quoted paragraph above and say it has no content.

Where does Burkhardt come down? The title is telling—as are his three lessons. "Privacy is the responsibility of the user"—but he boils that down to "Privacy online is an illusion." "Social media is public sharing of information"—again, the Parr simplification: there are no walls, public sharing is the new norm. He puts it oddly, saying FB wants to "*allow* people to share more across the web"—as though the problem is that people were unable to do the sharing they're all so anxious to do. Really? Finally—and this should come first and foremost, "People use social media for different purposes." But Burkhardt's earlier comments essentially say that only Scoble-style purposes are legitimate; that it's *OK* for the tools to betray other purposes. So, basically, Burkhardt thinks we should accept that privacy is dead and advise people to behave appropriately. Because information *can be* shared anywhere, it's apparently ethical and appropriate to *encourage* that sharing despite the wishes of the originator.

David Lee King also seems to boil things down to black and white in "Facebook and Privacy—is this REALLY a big deal" (May 17, 2010). He says FB should have told people what was happening and made it opt-in, not opt-out—but that's 49 words, followed by 609 words essentially saying "Nothing's private. Get over it." With a side helping of "*I* don't have any concerns about this stuff, so *you* shouldn't either."

I was hoping posts by library people would show a little more nuance. That's true for a Bobbi Newman post, "What's at Stake With Facebook is Not Privacy or Publicity But Informed Consent and Choice," but her post is almost entirely quoting material I've used elsewhere. Still, a good and thoughtful summary on Newman's part. I'm astonished that, when Newman commented on King's post saying part of the problem was FB changing the rules in the middle of the game, King responds "It's no bait and switch—it's their game. They created the rules, and have every right to change them (just as you have the right to not play along.)" Wow. Legally correct, yes. Ethically correct, not a chance.

Here's another librarian who takes a nuanced view—Jenny Levine, in another comment on King's post. A large portion of her comment:

> There are reasons to give users granular permissions, and it's because not everyone is like you. Think like your neighbor who believes Google is the only search engine out there, not like a techie or early adopter. Your information is scattered across the web because you purposely let it be, but the vast majority of Facebook users don't have blogs, Twitter accounts, Flickr accounts, etc. where they've already made information public. Their Facebook profile is their main web presence, so starting out with one privacy policy and then doing a total 180 is just plain wrong when the new settings are the default. I'm an early adopter who understands the settings (after a lot of reading up on them), and FB *inserted* likes for me when I removed all of mine. Apparently I can't have *no* likes, which are then going to be shared with the world, no matter what I do, short of deleting my account.
>
> Sure "social networks" are "social," but FB keeps changing the definition of that word. And obviously I define "social" differently than you do, because I limit my definition to my friends, while you're okay with that stuff being disseminated to the whole world and aggregated by third-party companies.
>
> Ultimately, I shouldn't have to conform to your definition, and you shouldn't have to conform to mine, so the middle ground should be FB giving us controls that let us each set our comfort level. Instead, they've implemented your definition and taken away mine, making for a pretty one-sided playing field.
>
> *You* may not have reasons for wanting to show your friends list, but other people like me do. I hope you can concede that others may have reasons to take a different approach than you do (or maybe they just *want* to be more private). If you can, then I think the title on your post is a little insulting. If you can't, I'd love to explore further why not.

Although I found King's post annoying (and, yes, insulting), the stream of comments—including the kind of extended conversation Levine can engage in within comment streams—makes it well worth reading. In a third go-round, King says he thinks FB's post-facto changes were wrong—but undermines that by essentially saying "but who cares?" That is: He thinks people want to keep "private" (that is, less public) things that *to David Lee King* are innocuous. And comes down to the black/white stance: If you don't want it shared *with everybody*, don't share it at all.

T. Scott also seems uninterested in nuance and a bit ahistorical in "It May As Well Be On the Front Page of the NYT" (May 18, 2010, *T. Scott*)—and

maybe the title is all I need to cite. He cites another article commenting on the sheer number of settings and options you need to deal with in order to avoid full disclosure and says:

> And I'm reading it thinking, But if you want all of that information to be that private, what in the world are you doing on Facebook in the first place?

Not a lot of nuance there—or in his use of the old cliché (which I've used as well) that you should never put anything on the internet that you're not willing to see on the front page of the NYT. Here's the ahistoricity:

> I do understand that people feel as if Facebook has pulled a bait and switch. They believe that they were led to believe that they would have more control over who gets to see their information than they now do--or at least than they now do unless they go through those 50 buttons and 170 options. The level of outrage is high. But seriously, I think it's misplaced. The whole point of Facebook was to build an application that enabled personal information to be shared with people that you don't know! So it makes sense to me that the default would be sharing and that you, as the user, would have to do something extra to prevent sharing. Being outraged that Facebook is developing new ways to share information without asking you first seems to me to be the antithesis of what Facebook is designed to do.

Yabbut... FB had one set of default assumptions and then changed it *drastically*, *retroactively* and *without opt-in*. And a lot of this isn't about sharing information with *people* you don't know; it's about harvesting information for *companies* you don't know. Did most people join FB on the assumption that it was a way their information would be harvested in whatever way FB found convenient, with options changed at FB's whim? I don't think so.

Openbook—public Facebook status updates

Phil Bradley offered a short commentary on May 23, 2010 on his weblog. He says what FB did is "very uncool" but "it's also worth considering the fact that people have to take responsibility for their own actions, and if they post stupid stuff to their status updates, they're in a poor position to complain afterwards." And "here's a shocking thought—if you don't want it public, don't write it in the first place!"

The primary point of his post is to point to openbook (youropenbook.org), a tool for searching FB updates—and, as he says, "a good one to use when training and/or demonstrating the dangers of not locking down a Facebook account." The site definitely has an attitude—in one corner is a quote from Mark Zuckerberg that I won't repeat here and the slogan is "Facebook helps you connect and share with the people in your life. Whether you want to or not." It comes preloaded with "cheating wife" as a search. I was unwilling to spend much time there; it's a sad commentary on, as Bradley says, "some of the mind bogglingly stupid things that people write."

Deleting your Facebook account (FAQ)

That's the title of Elinor Mills' May 21, 2010 item at *cnet news*. I find it hard to believe the poll quoted: "an estimated 60 percent of users are considering quitting Facebook over privacy issues." OK, so it's an online of 1,588 people; 16% claim they've already deleted their accounts, 30% say it's highly likely that they will, and 30% say "possibly." Sophos is up front about the poll not being scientific; I'm inclined to believe it's not representative either.

The rest of the article offers tips on deleting and deactivating—different things—and what deleting means for your data. The longer FAQ deals with some of the issues and uproar. There is also *another* poll, "Are you considering quitting Facebook over privacy issues?" At the time I checked the article, this one had 4,588 votes, including 57% yes and 17% maybe (and 9% don't use FB: only 16% said No). Do I believe 57% of FB users are *seriously* considering quitting FB? Nahh...probably closer to 0.57%.

danah boyd's Take

A few notes from several posts by danah boyd at *apophenia* (dated January 16 and May 14, 15, and 23, 2010). The posts tend to be fairly long and extremely well thought out, all worth reading in the original—and, to be sure, *apophenia* gets a lot of comments. (I'm paraphrasing, summarizing and quoting *brief* excerpts because boyd explicitly copyrights *apophenia* and does not show a CC license).

Facebook's move ain't about changes in privacy norms

This post predates the major furor but follows the January 9, 2010 *ReadWriteWeb* article discussed earlier—the one entitled "Facebook's Zuckerberg Says The Age of Privacy is Over." boyd's response: she wanted to scream. She provides the short version of her take on Zuckerberg's logic:

- People I knew didn't used to like to be public.

- Now "everyone" is being public.
- Ergo, privacy is dead.

She's not buying it any more than she bought the "privacy is dead, get over it" meme a decade ago.

> Privacy isn't a technological binary that you turn off and on. Privacy is about having control of a situation. It's about controlling what information flows where and adjusting measures of trust when things flow in unexpected ways. It's about creating certainty so that we can act appropriately. People still care about privacy because they care about control. Sure, many teens repeatedly tell me "public by default, private when necessary" but this doesn't suggest that privacy is declining; it suggests that publicity has value and, more importantly, that folks are very conscious about when something is private and want it to remain so. When the default is private, you have to think about making something public. When the default is public, you become very aware of privacy. And thus, I would suspect, people are more conscious of privacy now than ever. Because not everyone wants to share everything to everyone else all the time.

She offers a telling real-life scenario and how it plays out with FB. She also notes that being public *without consequences* is still largely a privilege, not the norm—and that essentially forcing people to be more public reinforces the structures of power and privilege. That's a discussion you're better off reading in the original; I can't do it justice.

Facebook and "radical transparency" (a rant)

boyd says she talked about privacy in her appearance at SXSW "because I thought that it would be the most important issue of the year. I was more accurate than my wildest dreams." She found that people focused on two of her case studies: Google and Facebook.

> After my talk, I received numerous emails from folks at Google, including the PM in charge of Buzz. The tenor was consistent, effectively: "we fucked up, we're trying to fix it, please help us." What startled me was the radio silence from Facebook, although a close friend of mine told me that Randi Zuckerberg had heard it and effectively responded with a big ole ::gulp:: My SXSW critique concerned their decision in December, an irresponsible move that I felt put users at risk. I wasn't prepared for how they were going to leverage that data only a few months later.

At the point of this post—all of 13 days ago as I write this—boyd found that while "people are cranky," FB assumed it was "just weirdo tech elites like me who are pissed off. They're standing firm and trying to justify why what they're doing is good for everyone." And that attitude is bringing on the potential regulators.

There's a lot more in this 1,900-word post (which isn't a rant by my standards). boyd's an insider; she knew about the "non-marketing studies" showing youth *are* concerned about privacy and she's been reading a forthcoming book about FB that suggests "radical transparency" is a core FB value.

> In short, Kirkpatrick argues that Zuckerberg believes that people will be better off if they make themselves transparent. Not only that, society will be better off. (We'll ignore the fact that Facebook's purse strings may be better off too.) My encounters with Zuckerberg lead me to believe that he genuinely believes this, he genuinely believes that society will be better off if people make themselves transparent.

Getting back to what may be the real issues:

> The battle that is underway is not a battle over the future of privacy and publicity. It's a battle over choice and informed consent. It's unfolding because people are being duped, tricked, coerced, and confused into doing things where they don't understand the consequences. Facebook keeps saying that it gives users choices, but that is completely unfair. It gives users the illusion of choice and hides the details away from them "for their own good."

Later:

> Forcing people into being exposed isn't good for society. Outting people isn't good for society, turning people into mini-celebrities isn't good for society. It isn't good for individuals either. The psychological harm can be great. Just think of how many "heros" have killed themselves following the high levels of publicity they received.
>
> Zuckerberg and gang may think that they know what's best for society, for individuals, but I violently disagree. I think that they know what's best for the privileged class. And I'm terrified of the consequences that these moves are having for those who don't live in a lap of luxury.

boyd is angry. Her anger is informed—and it's not about *her* public nature. "I think that it's high time that we take into consideration those whose lives aren't nearly as privileged as ours, those who aren't choosing to take the risks that we take, those who can't afford to. This isn't about liberals vs. libertarians; it's about monkeys vs. robots."

I'm going to quote one of boyd's very few responses within the stream of 90 comments, be-

cause it clarifies both her own opinions and where she's coming from:

> Let me be clear about one thing... Being public has benefits. Being open has benefits. But exposure (being forced into the public against your will) is a different beast. Choice matters. Having the choice to access publics is important. That's where change happens. Being exposed is not a change agent. We need to create the infrastructure where people feel comfortable making their voices heard. But we need to give them the choice to do so and recognize that there are people for whom that's not going to be beneficial.

Surprisingly, of 90 comments (quite a few fairly long, mostly thoughtful), there's really only one along the lines of "Don't like it? Quit." Maybe 1,900 words—some of them with more than two syllables—is too long for the simplistic crowd?

Facebook is a utility; utilities get regulated

There's a title that should send shudders down Mark Zuckerberg's spine. As the post begins:

> From day one, Mark Zuckerberg wanted Facebook to become a social utility. He succeeded. Facebook is now a utility for many. The problem with utilities is that they get regulated.

She started looking up people who wrote thanking her for the "rant" discussed above—and found that most were on FB. She wrote them asking why—and the response was consistent: They felt as though they needed to be there. (She cites Nancy Baym's post.)

> People felt they needed to stay put, regardless of what Facebook chose to do. Those working at Facebook should be proud: they've truly provided a service that people feel is an essential part of their lives, one that they need more than want. That's the fundamental nature of a utility. They succeeded at their mission.

In the forthcoming book (*The Facebook Effect*), Zuckerberg and others are *quoted* repeatedly as believing FB is different because it's a "social utility" rather than a social network. The problem with that is there's rarely much of a choice in utilities. "When it comes to utilities like water, power, sewage, Internet, etc., I am constantly told that I have a choice. But like hell I'd choose Comcast if I had a choice. Still, I subscribe to Comcast. Begrudgingly. Because the 'choice' I have is Internet or no Internet." boyd isn't fond of the utilities in her life:

> I hate all of the utilities in my life. Venomous hatred. And because they're monopolies, they feel no need to make me appreciate them. Cuz they know that I'm not going to give up water, power, sewage, or the Internet out of spite. Nor will most people give up Facebook, regardless of how much they grow to hate them.

To those reacting that FB isn't a utility, she says "You're wrong. People's language reflects that people are depending on Facebook just like they depended on the Internet a decade ago." The meat of the matter: Utilities get regulated—less in the U.S. than in most nations, but still. And, as she notes, FB isn't just in the U.S.: "It's quite popular in Canada and Europe, two regions that LOVE to regulate their utilities."

Turns out she's at least partly wrong in the next paragraph—where she says that *typically*, when a company oversteps its hand on privacy, "people flip out, governments threaten regulation, and companies back off"—but that hadn't happened *yet* with FB. She just needed to wait another week. (In an update, boyd says the title probably should have been "Facebook is *trying* to be a utility; utilities get regulated." That might have eliminated a lot of comments arguing that there are other internet utilities—and making undeserved character attacks on boyd and her employers.)

Venessa Miemis wrote an interesting sidebar on boyd's posts (and other FB-related posts) in "What is Privacy? a rant about Facebook & the open source movement," posted May 23, 2010 at *emergent by design*. Miemis wants to look at the emotional aspects of the situation and summarizes it in this sentence:

> **When conversations get commodified, we are lost.**

She says "the space where you share yourself and your life with others" is nearly as sacred as physical intimacy—and thinks "people are not so much upset that Facebook is making this sharing of ourselves more transparent, it's that this sharing of ourselves is being commodified, and people are making money off of it." Her answer seems to be an explosion of the open source movement. I'm not quite sure I follow the argument, but you might find it interesting.

Quitting Facebook is pointless; challenging them to do better is not

Here boyd discusses some (mis)interpretations of earlier posts—including nonsense like "Microsoft wants Facebook to be regulated as a utility." (Any-

one who regards danah boyd as an official spokesperson for Microsoft *really* needs a reality check—although it's true that she works at Microsoft Research New England.) She clarifies that she didn't necessarily *want* FB to be regulated; she just thought it was likely (she uses "inevitable"). And she finds it necessary to enumerate "six beliefs"—particularly given nonsensical discussions about "everyone" leaving FB:

> **1. I do not believe that people will (or should) leave Facebook because of privacy issues.**
>
> 2. I do not believe that the tech elites who are publicly leaving Facebook will affect the company's numbers; they are unrepresentative and were not central users in the first place.
>
> 3. I do not believe that an alternative will emerge in the next 2-5 years that will "replace" Facebook in any meaningful sense.
>
> 4. I believe that Facebook will get regulated and I would like to see an open discussion of what this means and what form this takes.
>
> 5. I believe that a significant minority of users are at risk because of decisions Facebook has made and I think that those of us who aren't owe it to those who are to work through these issues.
>
> 6. I believe that Facebook needs to start a public dialogue with users and those who are concerned ASAP...

boyd recognizes that FB *matters* to many people and it's no more reasonable to say "just leave if you're not happy" than it is to tell people to just leave their apartments if they're not happy with their landlord or just leave their job if they're not happy with their boss. As boyd implicitly notes, it's dangerous nonsense in the real world.) boyd also thinks "those with the most to gain from Facebook are the least likely to leave, even if they also have the most to lose."

boyd believes (I suspect correctly) that most of the high-profile characters ("digerati") who have announced their departure from FB weren't that involved with FB in the first place—and they're not *at all* representative users. She doesn't think people will leave FB en masse because they're already invested in FB. She notes that FB *expects* backlash from any change—and, she believes, has become numb to user complaints.

> Screaming about the end of Facebook is futile. And I think that folks are wasting a lot of energy telling others to quit or boycott to send a message. Doing so will do no such thing. It'll just make us technophiles look like we're living on a different planet. Which we are. Instead, I think that we should all be working to help people understand what's going on. I love using Reclaim Privacy to walk through privacy settings with people. While you're helping your family and friends understand their settings, talk to them and record their stories. I want to hear average people's stories, their fears, their passions. I want to hear what privacy means to them and why they care about it. I want to hear about the upside and downside of visibility and the challenges introduced by exposure. And I want folks inside Facebook to listen. Not because this is another user rebellion, but because Facebook's decisions shape the dynamics of so many people's lives. And we need to help make those voices heard.

As always, there's a lot more here: boyd doesn't do pithy at *apophenia* (for which I greatly admire her), and this one's the longest of the group at just under 2,800 words. In an update, she clarifies that she's not telling individuals *not* to leave FB; she just doesn't think there's going to be a mass exodus or that such an exodus would make sense.

Do I agree with everything boyd says? No, any more than I do anybody else. I find that she's providing thoughtful, worthwhile, nuanced commentary; that's worth a lot. (You can read that sentence without the semicolon if you like.)

What's Next?

This is a Zeitgeist essay, primarily concerned with the changes made to Facebook in late 2009 and early 2010. Thanks in large part (I would say "thanks *entirely*" but can't prove that) to the sustained uproar, Facebook announced a new set of privacy setting changes at about the time I was writing this piece.

Do the new changes solve the problem? Even before they're in play, one partial answer is that *they can't*—the betrayal happened even if it's fixed some weeks later, particularly given Mark Zuckerberg's public dismissal of privacy as an issue. (Similarly, some of us are *never* likely to use or trust Google Buzz thanks to the disastrously bad initial implementation.) It's also true that improving permissions doesn't do diddly for the few hundred million users who had their defaults changed and paid no attention to them—I strongly doubt that the new rollout will suddenly change April settings to be *less* public. But the changes may help—even as they raise new issues.

Most of that's irrelevant to this piece, which concerns a situation during a time period. Still, a few words about the new changes might be useful.

The new changes *add* an overarching control for content viewing permissions—and claim both that those permissions affect existing content and also that they'll stay in place for the future: No more "defaulting to public." The changes also improve control over how people can find you and what non-friend users can see about you., and let you opt out of sharing your friends list and Pages that you like. Finally, there's a straightforward way to opt out of "instant personalization" and sending information to third parties. There continue to be more granular settings—and, this time around, FB did not reset existing settings to their "Recommended" (default) options.

Mashable's coverage seems to say this settles the issues—"With controls this simple, it's hard to imagine users being confused or pundits throwing fits." (I suspect those last three words sum up *Mashable*'s stance on the whole FB brouhaha: Just some pundits throwing fits.)

Ars Technica's coverage (by Jacqui Cheng) is also positive: "Facebook finally gets it with new, simpler privacy controls." A quote from Mark Zuckerberg is less reassuring than it might be: "Don't mess with the privacy stuff *for a long time*!" [Emphasis added.] Think about those last four words, FB's track record for keeping promises and Zuckerberg's clear attitudes about privacy. Does "for a long time" mean "until people have mostly forgotten about this and we have another 200 million users"? (Am I being paranoid? I honestly don't think so; I think I'm paying attention to history. Nobody forced Zuckerberg to add those four words.) The very first comment seems to have the same nervousness:

> If they hadn't messed around with privacy so much in the past, and if Zuckerberg hadn't made the comments he made about privacy, I might have had a facebook account. This is encouraging, but their history tells me they can't be trusted.

Farhad Manjoo's a *little* more skeptical, as the subtitle of his May 27, 2010 *Slate* essay ("Friends Again") indicates: "Facebook has improved its privacy controls. Should we trust it not to screw up again?"

He notes that he earlier predicted that Zuckerberg would respond "by doing what he's always done": write a public letter and unveil a few new updates. That's what he did. Manjoo finds the new settings "drop-dead simple to use" but says that isn't enough: FB also needs to *educate* its users about the changes. "Given Facebook's track record on that, it would be foolish to guess that everything will go smoothly from now on." Indeed, even snapshots of the screens indicate that "education" will be on FB's terms.

Manjoo points out that the master switch doesn't affect directory information and third-party applications (but most people will assume it does). The new master switch does take care of the worst of the problems.

So far, so good—even though it doesn't really undo all the damage done before. But:

> You may find it hard to believe that Facebook has suddenly found the magic bullet for managing your privacy. Sure, these changes may look good now, but Facebook seems to redesign the site every six months. Shouldn't we assume that privacy, like everything else on Facebook, will become unwieldy once more?
>
> This is where you simply have to decide whether to trust Facebook.

We have Zuckerberg's promise that the master setting *will* take care of the future, even as Facebook rolls out *new ways* to share information (e.g., a location-based system). We also have those last four words and Zuckerberg's track record. Manjoo's response: "I'll believe it when I see it."

> I'm happy Facebook did all this. But while the changes are likely to stem the current outcry, I doubt that this is the end of our stormy relationship with Facebook. We're likely to see the same movie play out again and again: Six months or a year from now, the media, tech bloggers, and lawmakers will start yelling about the site once more. Zuckerberg, again, will be forced to respond. You watch.

Manjoo tells us why—and you'll have to read that for yourself.

Privacy Theater

That's a wonderful phrase—and the title of Ed Felten's May 26, 2010 post at *Freedom to Tinker*, which in turn links to a New York *Times* "Room for Debate" feature in which he and several others discuss whether the government should regulate Facebook. I won't get into that debate. This post relates to Felten's search for "a pithy way to express the problems with today's notice-and-consent model for online privacy."

Namely: You sign up, you click on something that says "I have read the terms of service/privacy agreement and I agree," and *you've consented*. You've probably done that dozens of times. How often did you actually *read* and attempt to understand the entire agreement(s)? Show of hands?

> Facebook's privacy policy runs to almost 6000 words of dense legalese. We are all supposed to have read it and agreed to accept its terms. But that's just theater. Hardly any of us have actually read privacy policies, and even fewer consider carefully their provisions. As I wrote in the Times piece, we pretend to have read sites' privacy policies, and the sites pretend that we have understood and consented to all of their terms. It's privacy theater.

Felten credits Bruce Schneier as inspiration, since Schneier speaks of "security theater"—those security measures that look impressive but don't actually provide security. Most of what happens at airport checkpoints is security theater.

What Felten sees with FB is the second form of privacy theater, much as we see in credit card "agreement" theater:

> Worse yet. privacy policies are subject to change. When sites change their policies, we get another round of privacy theater, in which sites pretend to notify us of the changes, and we pretend to consider them before continuing our use of the site.

Felten doesn't see any easy answer, except possibly (and partially) default rules. "If we can't provide the reality of privacy or security, we can settle for theater, which at least makes us feel a bit better about our vulnerability."

How to Get More Privacy From Facebook's New Privacy Controls

When I wrote this essay, my own FB account didn't yet show the new controls. Now it does—and I find that they're a little incoherent, as they're showing an "Other" column that's not explained and is inconsistent with the detailed settings. So I'll just recommend Kurt Opsahl's May 26, 2010 article in the EFF *Deeplinks* blog as a good step-by-step approach to making the most of the new privacy settings. It's clear, reasonably short (under 900 words) and includes a video (which I haven't watched) for those who learn better in that way. I suspect that, if you check off each paragraph of the EFF post, you'll have things under control.

For now at least—and, if we can trust FB, for the future.

Interesting & Peculiar Products

Twenty Terabytes and Counting

What's that? The Sony BDP-CX7000ES Blu-Ray Disc Changer, an $1,899 behemoth that holds 400 Blu-ray discs. (At 50GB per disc, that's twenty terabytes.) It's apparently a first-rate unit, based on the review in the January 2010 *Sound & Vision* and other reviews I've seen.

It *is* a behemoth: 17x9.5x22", much taller and deeper than most components. But it holds 400 discs! As I was writing this, I was first tempted to say, "Well, how much would 20TB of disk storage cost?" The answer, as of this writing, is *not that much*. Of course, 20TB worth of external hard drives wouldn't provide you with 400 Blu-ray movies, but it would be enough to *store* those movies (if you could get around DRM issues). For 20TB, you'd need ten two-terabyte drives or 14 1.5-terabyte drives. As I edit this, you can buy name-brand *external* 2.0 terabyte hard drives for $130 to $150. You'd get 20 terabytes for $1,300 to $1,500. Which is sort of an astonishing sentence to write! Internal storage would be a little cheaper, to be sure.

Classic Movies On Demand

I'm a little late on this one, but it's still a good idea if done right: the Warner Brothers Archive. Lots of movies aren't likely to be popular enough to justify restoring, remastering and releasing as regular DVDs—and I don't believe Warner is likely to release them to the public domain so Mill Creek Entertainment and the Internet Archive can make them available.

While that might be the ideal (I'd argue that if the film no longer has enough commercial value to justify a regular DVD release, it *is* the appropriate action), this is better than nothing. Warner provides a searchable database with brief previews. If you want the movie, you order it...and it's produced on demand, creating a one-off DVD-R for $19.95. But of course, since it's Big Media, that DVD-R contains a CSS-encrypted movie, so you can't make a copy for your mom. Oh...and you can apparently buy a download instead, for $14.95, but it's only for Windows (and it's not clear whether the quality is the same).

I picked up the item on *Spellbound Blog* from April 2009. Going to the link, it's not a massive resource: "500+ movies, shorts, TV movies and miniseries." I see 89 movies from 1920-29, 203 from 1930-39, 177 from 1940-49, 201 from 1950-59, 123 from 1960-69, 108 from 1970-79, 103 from 1980-89, and 26 more recent. I also see some specials—e.g., a 4-DVD set of "Classic Musical Shorts from the Dream Factory" for $29.95, a five-DVD "Torchy Blane Collection" for $39.95 and a really interesting six-DVD, 63-short "Warner Bros. Big Band, Jazz & Swing Short Subject Collection" for $49.95. The Important Note on the listings is interesting, particularly one word that I've highlighted:

> Important Note: This film has been manufactured from the best-quality **video** master currently available and has not been remastered or restored specifically for this DVD and Digital Download release.

Does that mean these are VHS-quality releases, comparable to the cleanest of Mill Creek Entertainment's movies (which tend to run $0.50 each or less, not $19.95)? Looking at the clips (which range from 30 seconds to three minutes), it's hard to say; given that they're offered as indications of video quality, I'd suggest "very good VHS quality," but they could be better.

Remember OQO?

On April 23, 2009, Eliot Van Buskirk wrote "OQO's Brutal Lesson: Innovate and Die" at *Wired.com*. It's an elegy of sorts for the OQO ultra-mobile personal computer, a "fully functional Windows computer that fits in the palm of your hand"—introduced in 2004. The critics loved it. Buyers? Not so much—if they could even get their hands on one.

Supposedly the new and improved Model 2+ would have a "breathtaking vibrant 5-inch OLED touchscreen" and up to 2GB RAM. It would also sell for $1,000. Just before this item appeared, OQO canceled all pre-orders for the device.

If you look at the picture in the story, you see problems. The keyboard's not much bigger than a slide-out smartphone keyboard: "Thumbable" but no good for typing. The screen's not much bigger than some smartphones. The price, though...that's a *lot* bigger. After all, a netbook would do the same stuff, have a workable keyboard, have a much larger screen...and cost about a third as much.

Going back to earlier items, the OQO Model 02 actually came out in 2007—weighing a pound. *Wired* gave it a surprisingly enthusiastic mini-review—given that this underpowered (1.5GHz VIA processor), overloaded (running Vista Ultimate with 1GB RAM!), minimal device (5" 800x480 display, 60GB hard disk, an undersized keyboard made even smaller to accommodate a separate numeric keypad—really?) cost $1,849. Yes, it weighed a pound. But...well, it's telling that OQO sent *Wired* a "testimonial" from a user who claims to have written 18,000 words on the device.

I've mentioned OQO before—in July 2002, when it was announced (and I poked fun at it), in July 2003 when it was "set to launch" but had gone up from $1,000 to $1,500, in August 2004 (when it was still *almost* maybe ready to ship any month now, perhaps), in December 2004 (quoting a November story saying it would be unveiled "next month" and was now up to $1,899)—and at more length in Midwinter 2005, when the Model 01 actually reached the market. At $1,999, with a 1GHz Crusoe CPU (you think 1GHz Atom CPUs are slow? you haven't heard about *slow*), 256MB RAM (running Windows XP) and a 20GB hard disk. OQO thought it was revolutionary. Very few other people did. The final *Wired* story seemed to view OQO as too far ahead of its time—but it may also be that the device just didn't make sense for any but a tiny group of users.

The Wikipedia writeup on OQO uses the past tense. The firm shut down in late April 2009. As is becoming increasingly common, the website remains, with a truly odd "about" page—starting with several paragraphs about the wonders of OQO and ending with "We are sorry to report that OQO Inc. is out of Business as of April 2009. OQO has closed." Web searching turns up the usual fans who say how wonderful the device was and how easy it is to type on, but very little indication that it ever had significant sales.

Really Big Optical Discs

Here's an interesting one, also from April 2009 (*Ars Technica*, April 28): A discussion of GE's claim that they'd soon be able to store 500GB on a single optical disc. Of *course* it's holographic storage; haven't Incredible Storage Breakthroughs been holographic for, oh, more than a decade now? (Track record on getting usable holographic storage into retail stores: Not so good, but when did that matter?)

Ah, but this is *Ars Technica*, not sister publication *Wired*, and Jon Stokes' article title is telling: "GE's 500GB optical discs: who is going to use them?" He's citing a New York *Times* article saying GE thinks they may be able to bring these discs to market in 2011-2012. That projection might be worth questioning—but maybe it doesn't matter. Stokes figures that Blu-ray offers enough storage capacity for TV playback for the next decade or two... "And by the time there's a demand for even higher-quality media, one would hope that our broadband infrastructure will be sufficiently improved that we could digitally distribute data-intensive content (movies, games, music, etc.) with very large file sizes." (Hope springs eternal.)

> So the prospects for a 500GB, mass-market physical medium in 2011 don't seem so hot. Seriously, what would we put on it? If its real-world lifespan is anything like that of the current generation of optical media (i.e., well under ten years), then those who need long-term archiving will stick with magnetic tape.

I believe Stokes is understating the lifespan of optical media stored under reasonable conditions (I have 25-year-old CDs that work perfectly), but his next bit is probably sound: While there may be niche applications, he wonders whether those niches are large enough to lead to reasonably-priced media and players/burners. ("Magnetic tape"? Not redundant hard disk arrays? Maybe.)

He also cites what must have been either error or stupidity in the GE promotional materials: A claim that 500GB is "4,000 times more data than the human brain retains in a lifetime."

> So you're telling me that over the course of my entire life, my brain retains 125MB of data? What with the human brain being analog and all, any statistic that purports to say how many bytes of "data" the brain "stores" is bogus; but even if you're going to take some dramatic license and make up a number, it should at least be a very large one. Ultimately, I think we should stick to "libraries of congress" as the standard hyperbolic unit of data storage capacity.

I find that 125MB figure pretty bogus as well...

Naturally several commenters had great uses for these discs—and at least one noted the number of times we've heard about great new holographic storage breakthroughs, none of which has made it to market. One person has an oddly shaky understanding of how storage costs have been changing: He (or she) thinks the future is solid-state modules "(assuming the module costs less and offers similar or greater storage)." Well, sure...except that, as fast as solid-state storage prices go down, hard-disk storage (and optical storage) prices go down *faster*.

Incidentally, I'm **not** ready to say 500GB discs would be useless—there are use cases for them, at the right price and with the right stability. But with commenters saying the discs would need to be "a few pennies at most" you have to wonder. (I *really* wondered about commenters complaining about current storage needs and citing 5GB as the largest writable optical disc they could buy. So neither dual-layer DVD-R nor BD-R exists?)

"Influential" Products...

Christopher Nickson posted "10 Most Influential Tech Products" at *Digital Trends* on June 2, 2009—but the subtitle is narrower: the "ten most life-changing devices ever grown from the humble transistor." Nickson notes the origin of the transistor (Bell Labs, 1947), a couple of landmarks (Intel's 8088 in 1979 with 29,000 transistor-equivalents; the Intel Core 2 Duo with 291 *million* transistor-equivalents—note that this was a year ago, before the i7) and a narrowing of the definition: These are only *products*, "available to the average consumer via regular retail channels."

Here's the list: Desktop computers; VCRs; game consoles; modems; computer mice; laser printers; laptop computers; digital cameras; cell phones; and smartphones.

Have laser printers actually been more life-changing than, say, effective wearable hearing aids or portable music devices (beginning with transistor radios and continuing through MP3 players)? The computer mouse: Life-changing? Maybe.

...Or Not So Much

That same month, Charlie Sorrel wrote "Buyer's Remorse: 5 Gadgets We Should Never Hage Bought" on *Wired.com*'s Gadget Lab. It's always refreshing (and unusual) to have *anyone* at *Wired* admit that shiny might wear off. These are much narrower than the sweeping categories above—and, frankly, much more controversial. They're all from 2009 and are mostly products that seem to be obsolescent shortly after you buy them. They're pairs—the "old" product and the new one that seems to make the old one less shiny.

What's here? Apple's iPhone 3G (people were annoyed because they were stuck with it for two years and the 3GS came out so soon); the Kindle 2 (because the Kindle DX came out so soon thereafter); "analog TV and digital TV"; "personal GPS and every cellphone"; "megapixels and more megapixels"—specifically in high-end Nikon DSLRs.

As you read the article, you see that *it's all bullshit*. What Sorrel is really saying, in essentially every case (except for slicing into President Obama because the long-overdue shift to DTV wasn't *communicated* well enough?), is "grow a pair." He tells Apple 3G buyers to "Suck it up, and quit whining." He says—*correctly*—that the Kindle 2 and Kindle DX "are quite different products" (he says the DX is "really too big to carry for most people"—but Sorrel doesn't attack the iPad for being too large to carry and used this same "It sounds like a critique but it's really a defense" approach in writing about the iPad); he seems to be making bizarre accusation about the DTV switch ("Most of the suppliers, and even the cable companies, are lying about the digital switch to get people to upgrade to unneeded new plans and equipment"); he seems to believe "every cellphone" has or will have GPS (Sorrel later assumes that *everybody* carries a smartphone)—and that cellphone GPS is a complete substitute for personal GPS units; and...well, I don't know enough to comment on the Nikon DSLR issue.

This is, in the end, pure *Wired*: He's calling buyers "stupid" if they're complaining. The shiny always wins. Some commenters were less than thrilled, particularly with statements by Sorrel that assume he knows what everybody else is thinking. Oh, did I forget to mention that he throws in a casual slur about hillbillies and marrying cousins?

Don Reisinger has a legitimate "not so much" list at *eWeek* on May 14, 2010—"10 Products Microsoft and Apple Want Us to Forget About." It's equal-opportunity snark: He alternates between not-so-great offerings from Apple and Microsoft. How many of these do you remember? Apple Newton; Windows XP for Tablet Edition; Apple Pippin; Microsoft Bob; Apple III; Windows ME; Apple Lisa; Windows Vista; iPod Hi-Fi; Internet Explorer 6.

Catching Up with the OLPC XO

I never thought much of Nicholas Negroponte's grand design for the One Laptop Per Child "$100 computer" (deliberate scare quotes, since the device was *never* available for anything close to $100), which seems to have been—or to be, if you prefer—an ideological crusade for a particular educational approach ("constructionist learning") rather than a hardware effort. It certainly never came close to the original goals or even to Negroponte's original statement as to the minimum orders needed to proceed with production.

Wired was behind it all the way. Given Negroponte and the notion that shiny technology will solve the world's problems (third-world children apparently need cheap laptops a lot more than they need clean water and medicine, those boring things Bill Gates is working on), how could it be otherwise?

Chuck Lawton wrote "The XO Laptop Two Years Later: Part 1–The Vision" on June 19, 2009 at *Wired*'s GeekDad. He describes the "considerable splash" from Negroponte's announcement, what happened when objective reviewers actually compared the XO-1 to netbooks—and the "considerable progress" that OLPC has made in "realizing their vision."

> (Digression: Lawton seems to handle the distinction between it's and its by using the short version of "it is" even when he means "its" as a possessive. Well, that's one way around the problem—and it's not like *Wired.com* claims to use professional writers or anything. He does this a *lot*.)

Lawton's approach is simple: Once you accept the stated mission of OLPC as the only criterion worth considering, the XO *must* be a success. It's not "meant for us" (anybody with computer experience). "It isn't a netbook, and it's not meant to be compared to a Mac or PC." He says it's "a tool – a gateway – to creativity and experimentation, sharing and discovery..." If you were excited about a cheap laptop, you were missing the point. It's about building an ecosystem.

Fair enough...in which case the obvious question is, "Is it working?" Here Lawton ducks the question. Yes, a few hundred thousand machines have been shipped, many of them because a few hundred thousand gadgeteers joined the buy-one get-one program. The vision that had governments thinking this was a good enough idea to order a million at a time? Not so much. And now, "the economic crisis" can be blamed for any shortfalls. In the end, apparently, if the vision is admirable, *its failure doesn't matter*. The "future indeed looks

bright" because the machine is designed around the vision. Here's a telling point:

> Netbooks have also been coming down in price matching that of the XO laptop, causing potential buyers to take pause before purchasing large quantities of XO laptops with a specialized user interface that focuses on learning.

Except that the point isn't spelled out: The XO laptop is focused on *one version of learning*—whereas cheap netbooks could be used for *any* educational system, not just Negroponte's version.

A month later, Lawton wrote Part 2, "A Look Back at the OLCP XO-1 and a Peek at the Road Ahead." (Sigh: Still full of "it's" for "its"—unfortunate for someone claiming to write about educational philosophy, I'd think.) He includes the minimalist specs (which do yield great battery life) and *loves* the "industrial design" such as the rabbit-ear lid latches and wi-fi antenna and the membrane keyboard (which prevents spillage and rain damage but would drive typists nuts). He admits that it's *really slow* and that recorded video from its camera looks pretty awful, that the speakers are so soft that the music software's almost useless and that some bundled applications are nearly impossible to use because of the screen's resolution. (Good grief: here's "as the menu's are too difficult to read." It's not just "it's." The man desperately needs a proofreader.)

Ah, but of course, these problems all go away with the XO-1.5 and the XO-2...although, since OLCP has laid off half its staff, these may be slow to emerge. And Negroponte is moving the goalposts: Now he's hot for "a no-cost connectivity program, a million digital books, and passing on the development of the Sugar Operating System to the community." His statement refers to "the moral purpose" of OLPC. He's immensely proud of the half-million kids around the world who have OLPC laptops; there's a little less focus on demonstrable educational and societal benefits from those laptops.

(The third part of the three-part series seems to be about the Sugar OS...and that is a case of "either you get it or you don't," so I won't attempt to comment.)

Looking at other OLPC-related items, it's interesting that Negroponte's announcement of the XO-2 has it as a *$75* dual-screen device—presumably based on the solid techniques that yielded the $100 XO-1. (As I've noted too often, Negroponte can get away with this crap for the rest of his lifetime, because he's A Guru and Never Wrong.) It's clear that the XO-2 has disappeared in OLCP's grand scheme of things before ever actually appearing.

Come December 2009, we have the XO-3, which Charlie Sorrel calls "A Crazy-Thin Tablet OLPC for Just $75." Unlike Lawton, Sorrel calls the original XO-1 "a flop however you look at it" and labels the hardware "vaporware." He calls it "essentially a giant iPod Touch for just $75." Well, we now *have* the giant iPod Touch, roughly the size of the XO-3 concept...but it's from Apple and it costs just a tad more than $75. (This is a surprisingly negative piece for Sorrel and *Wired*, but it's just a short squib.) A *Forbes* piece targets the XO-3 for a 2012 release, long enough away to avoid close scrutiny—but the "specs" are interesting at best. The unit would have an 8GHz processor, use less than a watt of power , be 8.5x11 (all touch screen, no real keyboard)—but also be one-sixteenth of an inch thick. Makes the iPad seem awfully clunky by comparison, but then the iPad is an actual device that you can actually buy and one that has actual batteries in it. (Oh, the $75 XO-3 also has a camera. It could be powered by unicorn farts, for all I know.) I saw several news reports on the XO-3, including a statement from an OLPC official assuring us that four EU nations would *have* to buy XOs for all their children—and a fair number of the news reports treated it as a serious device.

> Another digression: I had a couple of good items tagged from *Industry Standard*. Unfortunately, not only has it disappeared into *InformationWorld*, all tagged articles from it now lead to that site's home page—and the original articles are not retrievable, as far as I can tell. Sigh. That's twice I've had to wave goodbye to *Industry Standard*.

As for OLPC itself...the site's still around, and although when I reached it at one point the most "recent news" was from August 2009, when I went back half an hour later it showed news from May 2010. Uruguay appears to have given an XO to every schoolchild. Has it been effective? That may be the wrong question to ask. It's worth noting that Uruguay is hardly the kind of third-world country where getting *any* kind of educational tool into kids' hands is a triumph: The nation has near-universal literacy; it's not dirt-poor (roughly $12K

GDP per capita)—it's a strong, peaceful, secular, democratic developing nation with a strong educational system.

This discussion moves from OLPC as a set of products to OLPC as a philosophy and mission. It gets into issues of imperialism (should a bunch of Americans be telling African nations how to run their educational systems?), priorities (wouldn't the money go a *lot* further founding local library/educational centers?) and more. I've tried reading some OLPC resources—its own blog, OLPC News, etc.—and really don't know what (if anything) to conclude. Mark Warschauer makes a compelling case in "OLPC: How Not to Run a Laptop Program" (at *Educational Technology Debate*, edutechdebate.org/one-laptop-per-child-impact/), comparing OLPC's model to netbook-based programs in the U.S. Here are key paragraphs from his own analysis of OLPC's model and its results:

> The results are entirely predictable, and have started to surface. A handful of inspiring examples, based on terrific efforts by a few innovative teachers or students and backed by armies of volunteers, are touted. But, when examining the broader implementation, we learn that without professional development or curriculum development, and with little of the infrastructure that makes computer use in schools effective, teachers for the most part ignore the computers, which thus go largely unused in schools.
>
> As for home use of the laptops, children are initially very excited, but—again, apart from a few inspiring examples—they mainly use them to play simple games that do little else but displace time spent on homework or other forms of play. Within a year or two, the machines start breaking down and most families lack the means to repair them.
>
> Meanwhile, huge amounts of money have been wasted that, with better planning, could have improved education in a myriad of ways.

The lengthy comments on that essay are worth reading. They're not high-five "you da man" comments; they're long, argumentative, generally thoughtful and taking many perspectives. It's particularly interesting to hear from those who argue that it's more important to give kids computers than it is to solve fundamental health problems.

Note that the essay is one of seven you'll find at the URL provided above—the one that got the most comments. I suspect they're all worth reading, but I'll leave that to the educators among my readership.

Kiwifruit Make Lousy Grapefruits

Kevin C. Tofel's *actual* title for this June 23, 2009 piece at *GigaOm* is "As Small Notebooks, Netbooks Largely Dash Expectations." I've seen similar notes relating to Target—people who went there, thought "Gee, I can buy a notebook for $259," and were disappointed by what they got. Tofel cites an NPD survey on netbooks "showing that many consumers are bewildered and disappointed with the gadgets." The survey reached fewer than 600 netbook owners, to be sure, and may have typical survey limitations. (Netbooks sell by the *tens* of millions; according to market research groups, some 33 million were sold in 2009 alone.)

What the survey seems to show is not that netbooks are crap—but that people who buy them with unrealistic expectations are likely to be unhappy. So, for example, 60% of those surveyed "expected the device to have the same functionality as a notebook"—and, more bizarre, 65% of 18- to 24-year-olds (which might only be a hundred or so) "expected their netbook to perform *better* than a notebook." [Emphasis added.] This translates to "some 18- to 24-year-olds are stunningly naïve or believe in magic."

Tofel's article is, I think, on the money: Netbook manufacturers and retailers need to clarify what they're selling. Tofel speaks of "the three Ps": portability, price and power efficiency. Particularly compared to budget notebooks (it makes more sense to compare a $300 netbook to a $500-$600 budget notebook than to a $1,200-$2,000 ultralight!), netbooks weigh a lot less (half to a third as much), last a lot longer on a charge...and cost a lot less. The tradeoff is that they're not as powerful.

Some consumers clearly expect to get contemporary notebook performance from a netbook. That's just not going to happen—and if that's what you expect, you're going to be disappointed. Worth noting: Tofel owns a netbook and likes it a lot—but as a third device, not as a desktop or notebook replacement.

To Wash or Not To Wash?

No, this isn't about personal hygiene. I'm talking about solar panels (photovoltaic panels)—and it's something we're thinking about as the rainy season finally ends: Do we need to spray the panels down once in a while?

There's a July 31, 2009 entry on *The Official Google Blog* that addresses this issue based on actual experience with Google's modest little Mountain View installation (1.6MW, about 670 times the capacity of our rooftop system): "Should you spring clean your solar panels?" Google has two sets of solar panels: Flat ones on carports, tilted ones on rooftops—like ours. They analyzed the situation:

- For flat panels—ones with no vertical tilt—"spring cleaning" makes sense. (In Google's case, a sandy vacant lot opposite the carports doesn't help; in our case, a big vacant field behind our lot doesn't help.) Google cleaned the panels after they'd been operating 15 months...and energy output *doubled*. They cleaned the panels again eight months later...and output increased 36%. "We found that cleaning these panels is the #1 way to maximize the energy they produce."
- For tilted panels, Google found that rain does a good enough job, even though dirt accumulates in corners. (That may be less true for our panels, since they're thin-film and essentially frameless.) So far, "cleaning tilted panels does not significantly increase their energy production." Google figures the photovoltaic system will pay for itself in 6.5 years, a *lot* better than the 12 years you can reasonably hope for in a residential system. That may make sense: Google's costs for inverters will be relatively lower, the huge installation should have been relatively cheaper per kilowatt—and a very high percentage of the Googleplex's energy use must come at peak-energy-rate times, when photovoltaic is the most helpful.

Looking at the slides, it appears that cleaning tilted panels *might* be worth a 12% improvement—which, if you're paying for professional cleaning, probably isn't worth it.

Group Reviews and Editors' Choices

PC World's January 2010 survey of antivirus software covers standalone programs, with a sidebar on suites. This time around, G Data Antivirus (relatively cheap at $25) gets the Best Buy, although Symantec Norton AntiVirus 2010, Kaspersky Anti-Virus 2010 and BitDefender AntiVirust 2010 also get the same 4.5-star Superior rating.

A roundup of high-performance in-ear headphones in the January 2010 *Sound and Vision* necessarily relies on subjective evaluation (there aren't any good objective test methods for in-ear headphones), but in this case the reviewer was using $1,150 custom-fitted Ultimate Ears UE11 Pro in-ear phones as the comparison point. While none of these 'phones are cheap (and some of us aren't thrilled by deep-in-the-ear 'phones), they're a lot cheaper than the custom ones: $250 to $450, with most in the $300 to $400 range. Four sets were good enough for S&V's "Certified & Recommended" seal: the $400 Shure SE420s, Sennheiser's $450 IE8, Ultimate Ears' $400 TripleFi 10 and Etymotic Research's $300 ER-4P MicroPro. The writer doesn't declare a single winner for everybody's taste—his own favorite is the Ultimate Ears (but it's a little bass-heavy), with a tossup for others between the Etymotic and Sennheiser—and most of the less-expensive units are also very good.

PC World tests reasonably-priced Blu-ray players in the February 2010 issue, setting $300 as an upper limit. The test results in a Top 10, with some prices as low as $160. Oddly enough, that lowest price (and the #1 choice and Best Buy) is *not* a house brand—the Insignia in the test costs $180 (and comes in 10th). It's a Panasonic DMP-BD60K, and does include some network streaming (but not Netflix OnDemand). Want great images *and* great streaming? Try the second-place unit, the $300 LG BD390.

A long *PC World* April 2010 roundup seems to suggest that "Windows 7 desktop" has more meaning than, say, "contemporary Windows desktop." It's eye-catching if essentially meaningless. The long article suggests the Dell Inspiron Zino HD ($250 to $557) as a compact unit mostly to serve up media; the $2,000 Sony VAIO L117FX/B as an all-in-one (which they suggest could "let you do away with your TV altogether" if you think a 24" display is all you need); a $7,000 Maingear Shift as a tower (essentially a "personal supercomputer" with a 4GHz Intel Core i7, two 80GB solid-state drives serving as "a boot drive" and a 2TB hard drive, *three* high-end graphics cards using 6GB graphics RAM... and enough free bays to add another 8TB of disk space)—and, for each category, some alternatives.

The April 2010 *Home Theater* reviews the current Sony PlayStation 3 (the more compact $300 version) and the $250 Sony BDP-N460 Blu-ray player.

While the latter (available for $190 or less) is a solid player with lots of streaming-video options, the conclusion is that the PlayStation is a better deal, since it's still one of the best and fastest Blu-ray players around...and you're getting the game features for very little additional cost.

Offtopic Perspective

Mystery Collection, Part 2

Disc 7

Impact, 1949, b&w. Arthur Lubin (dir.), Brian Donlevy, Ella Raines, Charles Coburn, Helen Walker, Anna May Wong, Robert Warwick, Tony Barrett. 1:51.

Walter Williams (Donlevy) is a high-powered San Francisco industrialist who worked his way up through the ranks—and who's married to (and deeply in love with) a faithless wife. She's out to do him in, conspiring with her lover to kill him in the course of a road trip (where the lover pretends to be her cousin, hitchhiking back east).

Things go awry. The car's destroyed in a flaming wreck (colliding head-on with a gas tanker on the highway to Reno, apparently)—and Williams, left just off the road as dead, isn't quite (although the unrecognizable corpse in the wreck is assumed to be Williams). He chooses not to return to SF immediately, instead making his way to Larkspur, Idaho, where he forges a new life under a new name...until he decides he needs to make things right.

That's only part of the plot, and in some ways the most interesting part is the last half-hour or so, where he does return and the faithless wife attempts to pin the lover's murder on him. It's quite a story, involving detection and (of course) a new love interest, well played and plotted by all involved. The print's excellent and I found the whole thing surprisingly satisfying. It's one I'll watch again. $2.00

He Walked By Night, 1948, b&w. Alfred L. Werker (dir.), Richard Basehart, Scott Brady, Roy Roberts, Whit Bissell, James Cardwell, Jack Webb. 1:19.

A true-crime (or true-criminal) story and police procedural, with lots of narration and a feel that's reminiscent of (and apparently the template and inspiration for) *Dragnet*. It has a young Jack Webb—a couple of years before the original *Dragnet,* in his second adult role, as a forensics technician, not a detective. It's set in LA and heavily features the LA sewer system.

Richard Basehart plays Roy Walker, who could probably make an excellent living as an electronics whiz but prefers to be a burglar (and, later, robber) with electronics innovation as a sideline. We never learn his motive for seemingly-needless crimes; as one reviewer noted, all we learn is what the police learn. Among other things, this may be one of the first flicks to involve a criminal listening in on police-band radio.

It's an odd one, and of course I don't know what LA was like in 1946. Apparently, the storm drain openings are big enough so a full-grown man can just roll into them. The idea of getting crime victims to help build a good drawing of the perp's face was new (in this case, they use slides as a sort of identikit, working with a couple dozen robbery victims). And, to be sure, LA had an *endless* supply of police to send to a crime scene. The sleeve description is off (as it is for *Impact*), but that's irrelevant.

Not bad, not great—a little heavy on narration, a little light on logic, specifically Walker's motivation. Still, it gets points as, apparently, the first of its kind: A fact-based police yarn set in LA, with the names changed to protect whoever and showing police as hard-working people who sometimes have trouble with investigations, not as quick-witted romancers who have lots of shootouts. The print's OK. Including a $0.25 bonus for its significance as the inspiration for *Dragnet*, I'll give it $1.50

Quicksand, 1950, b&w. Irving Pichel (dir.), Mickey Rooney, Jeanne Cagney, Peter Lorre. 1:19.

This one's *not* a mystery, but a film noir—exploring how an auto mechanic going after the wrong woman can go from "borrowing" $20 to murder in about half a dozen not-so-easy steps. Although I'm not a great Mickey Rooney fan and he's in almost every frame of this film, I have to say he did a good job.

It's a fairly effective story, with a fast-moving plot. Peter Lorre plays one of several fundamentally dishonest people, in his case the proprietor of an arcade. Good but not great; I'll give it $1.25.

Eyes in the Night, 1942, b&w. Fred Zinnemann (dir.), Edward Arnold, Ann Harding, Donna Reed, Stephen McNally. 1:20.

The setup: a woman (Harding) finds that her stepdaughter (a 21-year-old Reed) is in love with her own former lover, who's managed to turn the stepdaughter against her. The former lover's an actor and the stepdaughter plans a dramatic career; they're both involved in a production that's in the works. But the actor turns up dead...and the daughter believes the stepmother's to blame. She goes to a famous blind detective, Duncan Maclain (Arnold) to see if he can help.

The reality: It's all espionage. The woman's husband has invented some formula important to the war effort. He's flown off for a final test before delivering it to Washington—and the butler in the house is a plant, part of a ring determined to steal the formula. The playwright who's directing the production is the leader of the gang, and they killed the former lover because he was unreliable.

The bulk of the movie is set in the scientist's estate, with the detective portraying the woman's uncle and trying to keep the bad guys from getting the formula. Somehow it all works out—largely due to Friday, the detective's seeing-eye dog.

Generally well played. Arnold's very effective as the blind detective. Not great, but pretty good. I'll give it $1.50.

Disc 8

The Man on the Eiffel Tower, 1949, color. Burgess Meredith (dir.), Charles Laughton, Franchot Tone, Burgess Meredith, Robert Hutton, Jean Wallace, Patricia Roc. 1:37 [1:27].

Charles Laughton as Inspector Maigret, with a young Burgess Meredith as a would-be robber...in a movie *directed* by the young Burgess Meredith (taking over for producer Irving Allen). His character's a near-blind (without his glasses) knife-sharpener who needs some real money. Enter a married playboy, dependent on his wealthy aunt, who wants to leave his wife for his American girlfriend—but his wife, who knows all about it, will only go with a substantial settlement. He'd give a million francs if someone would off the aunt (he's the heir)—and a nearby psychopath (Tone) hears about this.

Next thing we know, the aunt (and her maid) are murdered, Meredith's character is being framed, Maigret's in trouble for letting him escape from prison while awaiting trial and the psycopath's actively taunting Maigret. He's fond of lunch on the restaurant on the Eiffel's observation platform and notes that diving from the tower would be a great way to end things.

Lots of plot, lots of psychological strangeness, one more death...and, all in all, an interesting flick. It's sort-of in color (as with many other early color flicks, there's fading, whole scenes where some colors are missing or everything's red-shifted), there are missing frames (and more than just frames), it's a little damaged. It's also not as well directed as it might be. All that combines to $1.50.

Topper Returns, 1941, b&w. Roy Del Ruth (dir.), Joan Blondell, Roland Young, Carole Landis, Billie Burke, Dennis O'Keefe, Patsy Kelly, H.B. Warner, Eddie 'Rochester" Anderson. 1:28.

An absolute charmer, with Cosmo Topper (Young), the slightly-henpecked banker, once again involved with ghosts—this time quite unwillingly, and it *is* a mystery. Two women in a taxi; a hooded figure aims with a rifle, shoots out a tire, and *almost* causes the taxi to go off the road and into the ocean—but not quite. As the cabbie (O'Keefe) goes for help, the women flag down Topper (and his chauffeur, the inimitable Eddie "Rochester" Anderson of Jack Benny fame) to take them to Carrington Hall. On the way, one woman (Blondell) is sitting on Topper's lap—and since the Toppers are the Carrington's next-door neighbors (but it's a long drive to that next door), Topper's wife (Burke, a fine comedienne) sees them along the way.

That's just the start. The *other* woman (Ann Carrington, played by Carole Landis) has arrived to meet her father; she's heir to the entire Carrington estate and he seems to be in bad health. The servants are, well, strange—as is the family doctor. The two women switch bedrooms for the night—which results in the wrong woman being killed. Her ghost emerges—a remarkably corporeal ghost, capable of leaving footprints, opening doors, and getting drunk, but visible only when she chooses to be—and the chase is on.

It's a combination mystery and slapstick comedy. There's little more to be said about the plot, but the movie keeps moving—with hidden passages and lots more. The print's very good and this movie is certainly worth rewatching. Slight but first-rate. $2.00.

The Green Glove, 1952, b&w. Rudolph Maté (dir.), Glenn Ford, Geraldine Brooks, Cedrick Hardwicke, George Macready, Jany Holt, Roger Treville. 1:29.

The film begins at the end—when a jewel-encrusted saint's gauntlet, one that brought miracle-seekers to the little town honoring the saint until it disappeared—turns up once again, signaled by the church bells ringing (which they would never do while the gauntlet was missing).

Then we go back to World War II, an airman bailing out behind German lines, and the actual plot begins. Yank airman (Ford) discovers "journalist"/double agent carrying a bag with drawings and the gauntlet; for various reasons, he winds up with the bag but leaves it for safekeeping in a chateau as he makes his way back to the front lines.

Years later, the airman comes back to France, presumably to find the gauntlet (the green glove) and make a small fortune selling it. The rest of the film—most of it—deals with this adventure, as the double agent (an antique dealer in peacetime) is watching him, murders get the police involved, there's a beautiful woman who gets caught up in it all...

Nicely done all around, with a tense final 15 minutes or so—and the movie moves along nicely throughout. Good performances, good directing. The print's a little soft and not great b&w, the main thing bringing this down to a still-respectable $1.50.

The Second Woman, 1950, b&w. James V. Kern (dir.), Robert Young, Betsy Drake, John Sutton, Florence Bates, Morris Carnovsky, Henry O'Neill, Jason Robards Sr. 1:31.

Robert Young is an architect who, a year previously, lost his fiancée in an auto accident the night before the wedding—in a crash he's supposedly responsible for. He lives in a striking modern home (which he designed) on the coast—right next to a more traditional home, where a young woman visiting her aunt sees him and strikes up an acquaintance, almost immediately falling in love with him.

But he seems cursed: Over the course of a few days, a prized sculpture breaks, a prized painting fades away, his horse suffers a destroyed ankle and has to be destroyed, his rose bush dies, his dog is poisoned, he loses a prize commission because the package of drawings omits all the interiors...and his house burns down.

He thinks it's bad luck. The woman (who's an actuary) thinks that's impossible and sets out to investigate (against his wishes). The family doctor thinks he's paranoiac (the way they said it then) and doing these things to himself. There are two other characters: The wealthy head of the firm Young works for (father of the dead fiancée) and a cad who's also part of the firm and pretty clearly evil in almost every way.

Right up to the last ten minutes or so, it's not clear *at all* whether he's doing it to himself or whether someone else is responsible—and, for that matter, who the "someone else" might be. It all comes together in a great climax.

Well played and compelling. My only real problem is a grotesque logic gap having to do with timing, but to mention what that gap is would be a spoiler. Even so, the print's good, it's well directed, it truly *is* a mystery and it's worth $1.75.

Disc 9

Fog Island, 1945, b&w. Terry O. Morse (dir.), George Zucco, Lionel Atwill, Jerome Cowan, Sharon Douglas, Veda Ann Borg, John Whitney, Ian Keith, George Lloyd. 1:12 [1:09]

Businessman gets out of prison after an embezzlement sentence and returns to his mansion on a lonely fog-shrouded island (a former pirate hideaway, which may explain the secret passages). His wife died while he was in prison; his stepdaughter's there, as is a shifty butler. He believes that several colleagues—who framed him for the embezzlement and ran the company into the ground—murdered his wife as part of a search for the "hidden treasure" (which doesn't exist: the losses were due to bad investments). So he invites the lot of them out for a weekend. They all come, including the son of one who's died—and, other than that upstanding son (who wooed the daughter at college, but was rejected by her because she assumed he was after her money), they're a mutually-suspicious, backbiting, nasty little group. Oh, there's also his cellmate and former accountant...

Naturally, the launch that brought them all to the island has to go back to the mainland "for repairs." That leaves the lot stranded. After enticing them with some specific clues and items, he leaves them to their own devices—which mostly consist of trying to find the "treasure" and stalking one another. It's a lot more entertaining than I expected, and it all works out—sort of—in the end. (Well, not for the businessman, but you can't have everything.) The soundtrack is clipped just often enough to be annoying, and the print's not great. Not a masterpiece, but pretty good; with flaws, I come up with $1.25.

They Made Me a Criminal, 1939, b&w. Busby Berkeley (dir.), John Garfield, Claude Rains, Ann Sheridan, May Robson, Gloria Dickson, the Dead End Kids (Leo Gorcey, Huntz Hall, etc.). 1:32.

Johnnie Bradford, a southpaw boxer with a serious drinking problem, wins the championship—and, during the celebration, winds up in a brawl that leaves a reporter dead. He didn't do it, but he passed out during the process. His manager (who beaned the reporter with a bottle of booze, killing him) takes off with Bradford's dame, his watch and his money—leaving him as the obvious patsie. But the cops find the victim, put out a bulletin for the champ's car (being driven by the couple) and, in the chase, they wind up crashing and burning. The cops assume Bradford's dead and the case is closed. Except for one detective (who blew an investigation years before), Claude Rains, who notes that the burned guy's watch is on the wrong wrist...

Meanwhile, Bradford (John Garfield) goes to a lawyer to figure out what to do. He has $10,000 in a safe deposit box. The lawyer says he'll get it and to lay low—then gives Bradford $250, says he's taking the rest as his fee, and tells him to ride the rails as far as he can go. Which Bradford does, winding up at an Arizona orchard that's also a sort of rehabilitation camp for delinquents, namely the Dead End Kids.

It's run by a feisty old lady and her beautiful daughter (Dickson—Sheridan's the dame).

That's enough for the plot. Let's say the happy ending requires an unexpected and unlikely soft spot, but was probably the only way to end the flick. Lots of boxing; I wonder whether Busby Berkeley choreographed the fight sequences? A lot depends on your tolerance for the Dead End Kids, aka the East Side Kids and the Bowery Boys. In this case, I thought they were OK, although still basically hammy little thugs. Decent print. Call it $1.50.

Jigsaw, 1949, b&w. Fletcher Markle (dir.), Franchot Tone, Jean Wallace, Myron McCormick, Marc Lawrence, Winifred Lenihan, Doe Avedon, Hedley Rainnie, George Breen. 1:10.

A printer apparently commits suicide, but a cop—also the eventual brother-in-law of a breezy Assistant DA—checks into it and also winds up dead. The Assistant DA, who never seems to take much of anything seriously, gets deeply into a web of New York neofascists (who may be in it for the money), intrigue, attempted seduction and more murders—and along the way is appointed Special Prosecutor for the case (whatever that case may be). Lively, complex plot, but Franchot Tone as the hero really does seem a little too disengaged for the role. Still, it moves. Anybody who hasn't figured out the mastermind halfway through the film isn't really trying, but that's not unusual.

Quite a few uncredited cameos, mostly in a nightclub: Marlene Dietrich, Henry Fonda, John Garfield, Burgess Meredith and more. Some decent filming. Some damage to the print (missing bits and a white streak down the screen during portions). Not great, but worth $1.25.

Algiers, 1938, b&w. John Cromwell (dir.), Charles Boyer, Sigrid Gurie, Hedy Lamarr, Joseph Calleia, Alan Hale, Gene Lockhart, Walter Kingsford, Paul Harvey. 1:36 [1:39].

Pepe Le Moko is a French jewel thief now holed up in the Casbah, where he's essentially impossible to arrest. Enter a no-nonsense French officer who wants him caught—and a gorgeous Frenchwoman on vacation with her fiancée. There's not much doubt where this will all end, but the story—a classic—is in the getting there.

This one really *is* a classic, with Le Moko's slightly odd band of compatriots, his one song (well, with Charles Boyer playing the part...), the magnificent Hedy Lamarr, a great supporting cast, fine cinematography and all the atmosphere of the Casbah itself. The only letdown (other than a tiny number of lost frames) is the soundtrack, which has background noise and occasional distortion. That reduces the value of an eminently enjoyable classic to $1.75.

Disc 10

Murder with Pictures, 1936, b&w. Charles Barton (dir.), Lew Ayres, Gail Patrick, Paul Kelly, Benny Baker, Errest Cossart, Onslow Stevens, Joyce Compton, Anthony Nace. 1:09.

The movie opens with a bad guy about to be acquitted for a murder—as long as That Person Doesn't Show Up (but, as his pricey attorney notes, it doesn't matter—once it's gone to the jury, no new evidence can be admitted). He's acquitted, goes back to his apartment (surrounded by his gang), and finds A Mysterious Woman along the way (while also being ambushed for a photo by a crack newspaper photographer).

That's just the start of a plot-heavy picture, part comedy, part mystery, that includes two or three more murders, a ditzy fiancée, showering fully clothed, some heated arguments and, of course, a frenetic happy ending. I couldn't *begin* to summarize the plot, but it heavily involves reporters and photographers.

Slight, but fun. I'll give it $1.25.

The Stranger, 1946, b&w. Orson Welles (dir.), Edward G. Robinson, Loretta Young, Orson Welles, Philip Merivale, Richard Long. 1:35.

Neither fun nor slight, this one's a true classic—maybe a masterpiece. It begins at the Allied War Crimes Commission, as Mr. Wilson (Edward G. Robinson) *insists* that they make it possible for a secondary Nazi, Konrad Meinike, to escape—so he can lead them to a primary target who has erased all clues to his whereabouts: Franz Kindler (Orson Welles).

Meinike winds up in Connecticut, where Welles is a professor at a local college, now named Charles Rankin and about to marry the daughter (Loretta Young) of a Supreme Court justice. Meinike also winds up dead, to be sure—and the rest of the movie is about the process of getting Kindler to reveal himself. It involves lots of psychodrama and a fair amount of tension. Oh, and some checker games with the slightly shifty proprietor of the local drug store. And a lot about clockworks.

Beautifully directed and well acted (Robinson is particularly fine). Good print, marred very slightly by noise on the soundtrack. I can't possibly give this one less than $2.00.

Murder at Midnight, 1931, b&w. Frank R. Strayer (dir.), Aileen Pringle, Alice White, Hale Hamilton, Robert Elliott, Clara Bandick. 1:09 [1:06].

At 66 minutes, this film seems padded—as though a 20-minute short might have worked better. It begins with a, well, implausible idea (three people doing an extensive sketch involving shooting, in order to convey a charades clue to a couple of dozen guests—and since when can you speak doing charades?). The key: the "blanks" in the gun turn out to be real bullets. The rest of the film? A series of slow-moving killings and surprises, supposed humor that isn't funny, and very little suspense. I could barely keep from nodding off...

Not a very good print. Other than being dull, slow, tiresome and acted as though it was a stage play done by amateurs, it was so-so. Charitably, $0.50.

Kansas City Confidential, 1952, b&w. Phil Karlson (dir.), John Payne, Coleen Gray, Preston Foster, Neville Brand, Lee Van Cleef, Jack Elam. 1:39.

A big guy sets up an armored car robbery with great precision, making it nearly a perfect crime involving three ex-cons (all in current trouble), all wearing masks (as does the big guy) so they can't identify or rat on each other—and in the process framing a flower delivery man (Payne) who also did hard time but has reformed.

The deliveryman escapes the frame but, thanks to cops publicizing his arrest, can't find work. He finds out the name and destination of one of the three chumps (each sent to hide in a different country), tracks him down in Tijuana and makes sure he'll be along when the guy goes to get his share of the loot. But on the way, the chump gets shot and the deliveryman assumes his identity.

That sets things up for a tense plot in a Mexican resort with a fair amount of attempted double-crossing, a beautiful young law student whose father is an ex-cop (and, clearly, the big guy)...and, well, it all works out in a fairly elaborate finale. Quite a cast, including young (at the time) Lee Van Cleef, Jack Elam and Neville Brand as the three cons that did the robbery. Well acted, well filmed, classic noir style, worth $1.75.

Disc 11

Detour, 1945, b&w. Edward G. Ulmer (dir.), Tom Neal, Ann Savage, Claudia Drake. 1:07.

What a strange little film. Mostly told as heavily-narrated flashbacks from a down-on-his-luck guy in a little Nevada roadside café. He begins as an incredibly talented pianist (with *very* long fingers) reduced to playing in a dive nightclub from 8 p.m. to 4 a.m.—but in love with and engaged to the singer. Except that she wises up and takes off for Hollywood. After a day or two (?), he decides to follow—hitchhiking across country. He gets picked up by a snappy dresser in a fancy convertible who turns out to be trouble—and who turns up dead, in the rain, as the hitchhiker's driving and stops to try to put the top up. (As he's hitching, half of the drivers are on the right side of the car and in the left lane...but never mind.)

Things go downhill from there, as the hitchhiker decides he has to impersonate the dead guy...and manages to pick up a no-good dame who'd earlier been hitching with the guy. The rest of the story, such as it is, involves these two and it's neither pretty nor very interesting.

All in all, this seems like an attempt at noir, but not a very good one—mostly just depressing. The print's generally OK except for a minute or so of damage. IMDB says it was shot in six days; I believe it. After reading a few of the rave reviews at IMDB, I'll just accept that different people view low-budget, overacted, downbeat, depressing flicks differently. Charitably, I'll give it $0.75.

Too Late for Tears, 1949, b&w. Byron Haskin (dir.), Lizabeth Scott, Don DeFore, Dan Duryea, Arthur Kennedy, Kristine Miller. 1:39 [1:33]

Now *this* is noir—and a good, complex mystery. It begins with a couple (Scott and Kennedy) on their way to a party—but the wife wants to turn around because she doesn't like the hostess. The wife always gets her way—in this case, by nearly crashing the car. As they turn around, though, another car comes alongside and the driver throws a valise into their car (a convertible, conveniently). They stop—and find the valise is full of cash.

The straight-arrow husband wants to turn it in to the cops. The wife wants to keep it. That's the start of a plot that eventually involves the blackmailer who was *supposed* to get the money (Duryea), the husband's beautiful sister who lives across the hall (Miller), several murders along the way...and a mystery man (DeFore) who claims to be, but is not, someone who fought WWII in the same outfit as the husband. Who he really is...well, you'll have to see the movie. Scott plays a classically amoral money-hungry cold-hearted bitch, on her second husband and not yet into the money. Duryea isn't quite enough of a villain, which makes him more interesting. DeFore and Miller are both interesting characters (Kennedy, not so much).

Well-acted, very well plotted, reasonably well filmed. Unfortunately, the print's missing a few minutes and is a bit choppy at times. That brings it down to $1.50.

Mystery Liner, 1934, b&w. William Nigh (dir.), Noah Beery, Lila Kane, Major Pope, Gustav von Seyffertitz, Ralph Lewis, Cornelius Keefe, Zeffie Tilbury, Boothe Howard, Howard Hickman. 1:02.

The basic plot is straightforward—but also ludicrous: Running ships by remote control, over radio linkages, from land—and testing the concept on an ocean liner, passengers and all. (Would you like a lesson on why remote-controlled oceangoing passenger vessels make no sense at all?) Oh, and one specific vacuum tube is the key to all this working. But the captain seems to have gone crazy (and is supposedly removed from the ship), although that's not enough to keep the test from going forward. (The equipment could have been in Baron von Frankenstein's lab—it's that level of sparks, tubes, switches and other nonsense.) The means of communication between the ship and the remote control center, weirdly, is through panels that flash on and off and then show handwritten messages from the other source—since, you know, *radio voice* would be too advanced, but scanning from a panel is straightforward.

The real problem here is that the movie seems to be excerpted from a longer version—lots of scenes disappear partway in, there's no sense of overall flow, some of the characters make no sense whatsoever. It's an odd combination of slow-moving "action" and pieces-missing plot. It was also clearly shot on the cheap. The most I can give this unfortunate little flick is $0.75.

Scarlet Street, 1945, b&w. Fritz Lang (dir.), Edward G. Robinson, Joan Bennett, Dan Duryea, Margaret Lindsay, Rosalind Ivan. 1:43 [1:41]

Edward G. Robinson is always interesting when he's playing something other than The Tough Guy. Here, he's a bank cashier with 25 years on the job and five years in a loveless marriage to a harridan. His only pleasure is weekend painting—and he doesn't understand perspective, but does interesting work. He meets a lovely young woman (Bennett) and is attracted to her; she, with the goading of her abusive boyfriend (Duryea) who appears to be several steps below ordinary sleaze, starts taking him for money that he really doesn't have. Ah, but she and her boyfriend believe he's an Important Artist, not a low-level bank employee, so of course he's rolling in it...

One thing leads to another, including the boyfriend's bizarre decision to try to make money from the unsigned paintings (which the cashier's moved to the apartment he rented for the girl, largely because his wife threatens to throw out the paintings), which leads to the girl being identified as the artist. I won't describe the rest of the plot; even by noir standards, it's complex and downbeat...including the execution of someone where, well, he didn't commit the murder, but it's hard to be as outraged as we should be.

The print's damaged at points (with a line running down it and two minutes missing) and once in a while the sound's not great. But it's well directed (by Fritz Lang), well photographed, well acted and the bleak outlook is appropriate. It's a solid noir—I found it discouraging but definitely well done. $1.50.

Disc 12

Midnight Manhunt, 1945, b&w. William C. Thomas (dir.), William Gargan, Ann Savage, Leo Gorcey, George Zucco, Paul Hurst, Don Beddoe, Charles Halton, George E. Stone. 1:04 [1:02].

Let's see...villain (Zucco) enters victim's hotel room, shoots victim (Stone) (who's recognized him), removes wallet full of diamonds. Victim, not quite dead yet, staggers to door of room. Next, we're in the Last Gangster Wax Museum (really!), which somehow has a cop manning a desk in the office—and a tired, would-be retired, proprietor who's taken in $20 after standing all day. His worker is the ever-annoying Leo Gorcey, replete with malapropisms and an unlightable cigar. There's also a somewhat disgraced female reporter who lives upstairs from the pathetic museum and her ex-boyfriend, another reporter who also shoots craps with loaded dice.

The plot? Joe Wells, assumed dead for several years, *is* dead but not for five years—he's the victim, and he expires on the stairwell to the reporter's apartment. From there, he keeps appearing and disappearing—on exhibit and in one or another car as villain, reporters, police all wander around looking for him and making wisecracks. None of it seems to make much sense or matter much. This is an odd trifle—I guess it's a comic mystery, but there's no mystery and precious little comedy—that seemed overlong at an hour. For fans of Leo Gorcey or Ann Savage, it might be worth $0.75.

Murder by Television, 1935, b&w. Clifford Sanforth (dir.), Bela Lugosi, June Collyer, Huntley Gordon, George Meeker, Henry Mowbray, Charles Hill Mailes, Hattie McDaniel, Allen Jung. 0:53 [IMDB and actual runtime, but sleeve says 1:00]

Experimental subjects are forced to watch "reality" TV until they rip their own heads off in despair. Well, no...but the real plot's even stranger. During the experimental years of TV, one experimenter has designs years ahead of everybody else—and not only won't he sell out for several million dollars, he hasn't even patented the designs. He arranges The Big Demonstration at his laboratory in a house full of guests (all in formal dress). It's impressive: He can cover the whole U.S. from a single broadcast

station and the enormous piece of equipment—seemingly a single camera—cuts to different angles as though it was a three-camera setup. Oh, and there's another twist: He can dial in views *from anywhere on earth*—apparently, this TV doesn't require a camera. It's MiracleVision in 1935!

But he also keels over midway through this phenomenal demonstration. Thus starts the mystery—which is an odd mix of slow and fast, with vignette scenes, a police inspector who seems to accept that a "brain scan" unit absolutely identifies whether somebody has a criminal mind or not (and, if not, of course they must be innocent), some clown who keeps trying to get in the house on important business (comic relief, I suppose) and some star turns by Hattie McDaniels of *Gone with the Wind* fame (but that was four years later). Oh, and Bela Lugosi...to explain his role would involve plot spoilers.

But between the print—with just enough missing spots to obscure some important dialogue—and the bizarre staging, it really doesn't hang together very well. There really isn't any acting to speak of. As generous as I might want to be, I can't give it more than $0.75.

The Moonstone, 1934, b&w. Reginald Barker (dir.), David Manners, Phyllis Barry, Gustav von Seyffertitz, James Thomas, Herbert Bunston, Charles Irwin, Elspeth Dudgeon, John Davidson. 1:02 [0:46]

We open with Inspector Cuff called in by his superior at Scotland Yard and told to go to a remote mansion because the Moonstone (a fabulous yellow diamond with, possibly, a curse on it) is going to be delivered there and it will be a target for thieves.

Then we cut to the mansion, where we have a doctor who seems to be mostly a befuddled scientist incapable of paying his bills, another doctor who isn't who he seems, a daughter who's extremely willful, a friend of the daughter who wants to have her for his own (but her fiancée is about to arrive—he's the one bringing the Moonstone along with a Hindu servant who speaks flawless, unaccented English), a smart-talking housekeeper, a maid who's also not who she seems to be...and a money-lender who's about to foreclose on the mansion.

Moonstone arrives, in the midst of a terrible storm that forces the money-lender to stay overnight. Lights go out, Moonstone disappears, Moonstone reappears, people go to bed, Moonstone disappears, Cuff asks lots of questions...and eventually The Mystery is Solved.

The sleeve copy says "the thief resorts to murder and assault to cover their tracks"—which might have happened in the full B flick, but not on this substantially shorter version, one almost totally free of violence. I don't really know what to make of this: Some dialogue is missing, the acting is peculiar, it's remarkably slow-moving for something no longer than a TV episode and it doesn't seem to amount to much. $0.50.

Great Guy, 1936, b&w. John G. Blystone (dir.), James Cagney, Mae Clarke, James Burke, Edward Brophy, Henry Koller, Bernadene Hayes, Edward McNamara, Robert Gleckler, Joe Sawyer. 1:15 [1:06]

The chief of the Department of Weights and Measures winds up in the hospital because of an "accident"—and appoints former boxer Johnny Cave (Cagney) as his chief deputy inspector, in charge while he's hospitalized. Cave, tough as nails and twice as honest, won't touch the ready bribes—and is convinced his girlfriend's boss is a crook. One thing leads to another; with the help of apparently-honest and incorruptible police, the good guy wins.

The best thing this flick has going for it is Cagney. Even with a few minutes missing and some clipped dialogue, he does a fine job, making a fairly ordinary picture entirely watchable. It's flawed, but it's good. On balance, I'll give it $1.25.

Summing Up

Three classics each easily worth $2: *Impact*, *Topper Returns*, *The Stranger*. Three more near-classics at $1.75: *The Second Woman*, *Algiers*, *Kansas City Confidential*. Add another seven very good $1.50 flicks and another five at $1.25, and you come up with eighteen worthwhile films, worth easily $27.25 altogether—not bad for one-tenth of this megaset.

My Back Pages
Three-Strikes for Print

Ed Felten posted a wonderful piece at *Freedom to Tinker* on May 13, 2009, "A Modest Proposal: Three-Strikes for Print." Since the blog has a CC BY-NC license, here's the whole thing:

Yesterday the French parliament adopted a proposal to create a "three-strikes" system that would kick people off the Internet if they are accused of copyright infringement three times.

This is such a good idea that it should be applied to other media as well. Here is my modest proposal to extend three-strikes to the medium of print, that is, to words on paper.

My proposed system is simplicity itself. The government sets up a registry of accused infringers. Anybody can send a complaint to the registry, as-

> serting that someone is infringing their copyright in the print medium. If the government registry receives three complaints about a person, that person is banned for a year from using print.
>
> As in the Internet case, the ban applies to both reading and writing, and to all uses of print, including informal ones. In short, a banned person may not write or read anything for a year.
>
> A few naysayers may argue that print bans might be hard to enforce, and that banning communication based on mere accusations of wrongdoing raises some minor issues of due process and free speech. But if those issues don't trouble us in the Internet setting, why should they trouble us here?
>
> Yes, if banned from using print, some students will be unable to do their school work, some adults will face minor inconvenience in their daily lives, and a few troublemakers will not be allowed to participate in -- or even listen to -- political debate. Maybe they'll think more carefully the next time, before allowing themselves to be accused of copyright infringement.
>
> In short, a three-strikes system is just as good an idea for print as it is for the Internet. Which country will be the first to adopt it?
>
> Once we have adopted three-strikes for print, we can move on to other media. Next on the list: three-strikes systems for sound waves, and light waves. These media are too important to leave unprotected.

I have to agree. Banning people from reading after three complaints is *exactly* as reasonable as banning them from the internet...particularly since we're talking about accusations here, not proof.

As you'd expect, some of the comments are charming extensions. Rikard suggests that the idea should be extended to the thought process. *Of course*, at least one commenter assumes Felten's making a serious proposal and just doesn't get it.

What makes this less amusing: In Ireland, at least, one of the largest ISPs has agreed to exactly that: disconnecting users who have three *complaints*, not three proven violations. Other countries, UK included, are ramping up three-complaint rules. (Source: *Ars Technica*.)

Overstating the Case

There's a letter in the February 2010 *Stereophile* in which the correspondent—a big fan of single-ended triode (SET) amplifier design quotes Wikipedia calling SET lovers "people with more money than sense" and SET amps themselves as "dinosaur technology that doesn't stand up to even cheap solid-state."

That's amusing—but not as amusing as the editor's response, given here in full:

> Ah, the modern marvel that is Wikipedia. It's only correct when the entry is about something you know nothing about.

I'm as prone to make fun of Wikipedia as anyone, but that snappy response could apply equally well to a *lot* of professional journalism. It does not apply to Wikipedia in general; articles may be flawed and biased, but they're frequently—even usually—knowledgeable.

So I had to look up this amusing entry, supposedly at "Single-ended triode." The quoted text was there—for about one month in 2009. It was inserted in late September 2009 and, after being peppered with "citation needed" items, replaced with a *favorable* comment about SET sound quality in late October 2009. By the time the February 2010 issue was being edited, the text was almost certainly not there. The article struck me as a generally good (if, perhaps, way too favorable) overview of SET technology.

The Global Village—or Not?

An item dated June 18, 2009 on *the physics arXiv blog* at *Technology Review* discusses the claim that email is making geographical distance less important. The first paragraph:

> If you think e-mail is making geographical distance less important, think again. A new analysis indicates that the opposite may be true.

The analysis? Two researchers at the Hebrew University looked at "the messaging habits of 100,000 Facebook users by zip code." Quoting the piece again—because I find the wording a little baffling:

> [They] say that the volume of e-mail traffic as a function of geographical distance follows an inverse power law. They collected data on the location of the receivers of more than 4,500 e-mail messages, finding a similar distribution.
>
> Their conclusion is that far from reducing the importance of geographical location, electronic communication appears to have increased it, probably because people swap more messages with those they have personal interaction with.

But...Facebook isn't an email system. Isn't there a reasonable distinction between email and wall posts/messages? (Yes, the paper itself uses "email"

instead of "messages." Maybe the distinction isn't important.)

The researchers also point out that the whole "six degrees of separation" idea is, shall we say, overstated: When the experiment was performed, only 384 of 24,163 email chains were completed. In other words: **98.4% of the time**, attempts to reach somebody within "six degrees" failed.

Why is this here instead of in TRENDS & QUICK TAKES? Because it doesn't prove much of anything except two points I'd consider obvious:

- Claims that geographic distance no longer matters *at all* were overstated.
- (Many) people interact virtually more often with people they know in real life than with others, and real-life acquaintance tends to be geographical.

As wise people might say, "Well, duh!" We exchange a lot more Facebook messages with our family and close friends (most of whom are, or used to be, fairly nearby) than with people halfway across the world who we've never met.

Does that mean distance is as important as it ever was? Clearly not. I can collaborate with somebody in Australia without staggering costs or absurd delays. That doesn't turn the world into a global village; it does *lower the boundaries* set by distance.

The title of the paper is "Distance Is Not Dead: Social Interaction and Geographical Distance in the Internet Era." Of course distance is not *dead* (i.e., wholly unimportant), but it's much less important than it used to be. (The first comment gets this exactly right: 90% of your non-spam messages may be to and from people nearby—but the 10% is also significant. Other commenters say much the same thing in slightly different ways.)

What a Difference a Buck Makes

There's a directory of video projectors in the March 2010 *Home Theater Magazine*—starting with an overview and featuring the magazine's "Top Picks" in each of three price ranges. Those ranges are important because *Home Theater* rates only within a range—that is, a five-star product defined as "Entry Level" might be inferior to a three-star product defined as "High End."

What gets the listing here is the juxtaposition of two Top Picks—the more expensive of two Entry Level (the magazine actually says "Entr Level" but never mind) units and the least expensive of five "Midrange" units. The first, Epson's PowerLite Home Cinema 6500 UB LCD Projector, is "truly remarkable for the price" but not all that bright, apparently. The second, Sony's VPL-HW15 SXRD Projector, gets a rave writeup, keeping the reviewer glued to his seat long past bedtime. Indeed, it rates slightly better than a considerably more expensive Epson model.

Did I mention prices? The "Entry Level" Epson lists for $2,999. The "Midrange" Sony lists for $3,000. So, you know, they're in *entirely* different brackets. (Except that Sony's website lists the VPL-HW15 at $2,999. Does that make it Entry Level? Did the reviewer round up, causing the Sony to jump into a different category?)

If It Looks Like a Duck…

Another oddly amusing item—this time in Kalman Rubinson's "Music in the Round" column in the March 2010 *Stereophile*. Rubinson is sort of an odd duck at *Stereophile* anyway—his specialty is surround-sound, so he's not wedded to vinyl or to ultra-low-power stereo amplifiers.

In this column, he reviews to universal Blu-ray players (players that not only play Blu-ray and DVD but also DVD-Audio and SACD: "universal" doesn't extend to HD-DVD). One is an upgraded version of the Oppo BDP-83, a breakthrough product that more-or-less defines value. The "special edition" BDP-83SE is $899 and apparently does represent a significant improvement over the BDP-83 (which sells for $499), at least for those who can tell the difference (primarily in sound quality).

The other is the Lexicon BD-30. It's based on the BDP-83—well, it *is* the BDP-83, but with Lexicon's own chassis and front panel and, supposedly, circuitry upgrades. It sells for $3,499—*seven times as much*. When Rubinson did single-blind comparisons between the Lexicon and the BDP-83 (*not* the BDP-83SE), he found, at most, differences so slight that he couldn't be sure he was actually hearing differences. What makes the Lexicon worth an extra $3,000? Lexicon's answer: "Ours looks like a CEDIA-grade product [CEDIA is the custom-installation audio group], performs like a CEDIA-grade product, is integrated and installed by CEDIA-grade professionals and is backed up with one of the strongest warranties in the business." Rubinson's conclusion? "I do not think that most buyers would find the minor improvements

cost-effective, but Lexicon's customer base probably would find some added value in both the presentation and Lexicon's dealer base."

Would you find a Honda Civic—already a very good car—worth *seven times as much* if someone slapped a Porsche label on it and maybe a better paint job? Some people would.

Update: The editor's column in the April 2010 *Stereophile* discusses the Lexicon BD-30...and Lexicon's claims for its upgrades. It also notes an Audioholics review with photos indicating that "the complete Oppo player had been dropped into a new chassis, with no other hardware changes made." Editor John Atkinson isn't thrilled with Lexicon: "If it is a truism that... 'audiophiles perfect what the mass market selects'... we also expect audiophile companies in search of that perfection to do more than slap on their products a hefty front panel and an equally hefty price."

The Wearable Internet Will Blow Mobile Phones Away

Maybe I should just cite the headline, from a Richard MacManus piece on July 19, 2009 at *ReadWriteWeb*, and let it stand. It's woowoo stuff: a TED session with an MIT Media Lab person demonstrating a wearable computing system "that allows users to display and interact with the Web on any surface—including the human body." The developer takes photos with his hand, calls someone by keying their phone number on his hand, displays info about a person he's just met...on their t-shirt. MacManus' studied, thoughtful conclusion?

> Look out mobile phones, because in a decade's time wearable systems may be the primary means of accessing the Web!

I can't take this seriously enough to put it in INTERESTING & PECULIAR PRODUCTS. Right now, the "system" means hanging a webcam, a little projector and a mirror around your neck, and wearing colored caps on your fingers. Ah, but in a decade "it could be one device and as small as a watch. Or indeed maybe a brain implant." Aren't *you* just waiting to have this stuff implanted into your brain—phishing, spam and all?

I know, I know, ubiquitous computing, gestures, blahblahblah. That's why we all stopped using physical keyboards and switched to those projected keyboards that have been available for years now. Keyboards are *so* 20th century; it's all gestures and voice recognition now. That's why Apple doesn't sell a keyboard for the iPad. Oh wait... The piece calls this "The Internet as Sixth Sense." Not surprisingly, most avid RWW readers and commenters thought it was hot stuff.

It's Been a Long, Sad Journey

Sound+Vision (the running footer says *soundandvision.com*) is what's left of *Stereo Review* (and, I believe, some other predecessors and absorbed competitors). It's proudly mainstream (focusing mostly on midrange products, not the high end). It's gone downhill (in my opinion). And, recently, it went through Yet Another Redesign. Now, *all* the text in the magazine is good old Boring Sans Serif (if it isn't Helvetica, it's equally boring)—but most of it is fully justified. And it's got shiny new tab-style page headers—you know, having a box at the top left of a spread with a big "F" (and, to the left, "FEATURES" in smaller type, with the issue date below that) adds *so much meaning and clarity* to the magazine outline. Or, rather, makes it look like something that maybe, probably, *should* be on the web, where the very narrow columns might be reasonable. (There's also plenty of white text on black backgrounds, just to keep things...dreary.)

The text continues to slide as well. Just in one issue, the April/May 2010 issue, I see offhand:

- A sidebar that takes a projection on *player* sales (Blu-ray player sales will "eclipse" DVD models within 3 years; I'm assuming "eclipse" has its new meaning of "slightly exceed"—and since Blu-ray players are dropping so much in price, the only oddity about this projection is that it's three years out)...and turns it into an elegy for *DVDs themselves*. Because, you know, Blu-ray players won't play DVDs, right? Wrong? (Think I'm overstating? The headline is "DVD RIDES INTO THE SUNSET" and the last sentence is "DVD, we hardly knew ye.")
- Three pages later, we're given a "home theater installation" piece that talks about a PR executive's new home "that's both green and smart." Sure it is. The home measures **4,350 square feet**. Given no indication that the woman plans to have several generations and a variety of other families living there,

this mansion is only "green" in the sense that it uses some environmentally preferable techniques along with using at least twice the materials of a reasonably large house. It may be "42% more efficient than a traditional home"—but it's more than twice the size of a traditional home. And when I read that a "geothermal system" (the house does *not* appear to have solar photovoltaic panels) "will save the family an estimated $5,985 per year on fuel costs" I really have to wonder...just how much does that *leave*? (People can do whatever they please with their money, but calling mansions filled with home electronics toys "green" is an insult to environmental responsibility.)

- The writers seem only vaguely in touch with the *rest* of technology even as they tout the latest in home-theater technology. Take a writeup on new audio gear, including a music system that apparently has 4TB disk storage to store "6,000 CDs in uncompressed format" (I say "apparently" because 6,000 700-MB discs would require a little over 4TB) for a mere $7,900. Here's the fun part: The article says "But with computer hard drives now selling for under a buck per gigabyte, even uncompressed high-resolution recordings can be stored inexpensively." That sentence is absolutely correct: Hard disks, internal or external, *do* sell for "under a buck per gigabyte." But, you know, if I read that a car sells for "Under $20,000," I would assume it goes for something like $17,000 to $19,999—so I'd assume "under a buck per gigabyte" means, oh, $0.60 to $0.95 per gigabyte. How much does *external* hard disk storage actually cost these days? Try 7.5 *cents* a gigabyte (for a $150 2TB external drive)—and you could get that down to a nickel a gigabyte for an internal drive. Even given the lag of magazine publishing, it's been a *long* time since "under a buck" was a reasonable ballpark statement for the per-gig cost of a hard disk. (Of course, thinking that a $7,900 system that's mostly hard disk and a little circuitry includes nearly $4,000 worth of hard disks makes it a bargain...compared to recognizing that it includes about $300 worth of hard disks.)
- Casual misogyny: Also always amusing. Page 49, the same issue, a reviewer begins the review of a $2,934 surround-sound speaker system with this paragraph: "As we age, we often give up the pursuit of the great and settle for the good. We settle for sedans instead of sports cars because they get us to work every day. We settle for less-than-glamorous domestic partners, thankful that they can carry on a good conversation..." I'm sure millions of women will be happy to know their husbands "settled" for someone who's a great partner but doesn't happen to be Glamorous.

No, I'm not canceling the subscription. I'm just amused and a little sad.

Remembering 1984

I didn't really comment on the kerfuffle in July 2009 when Amazon deleted some copies of George Orwell's *1984* and *Animal Farm* from Kindles because the source was pirated. To me, the interesting point wasn't that Amazon did this—but that it pointed up one truth of any DRM-laden ebooks and any system that requires links back to the source of the books: You don't own the ebooks, you're *provisionally* leasing them—and you may not be sure just what it is you're leasing. (Since then, Amazon's revised its terms of service and says it wouldn't do this again...I think.)

There was a *lot* of reaction and I tagged a few items for comment. That comment seems to belong here—it's worth noting but maybe not worth serious discussion at this late date.

- Alan Wexelblat said "Amazon's Gaffe Isn't What You Think It Is" in a July 21, 2009 post at *Copyfight*. Wexelblat, noting the titles involved, wonders whether this wasn't a deliberate hack set up to embarrass Amazon—since it happened right around the time the nook was emerging. Even that isn't particularly important, though—what's noteworthy is that Amazon *could* have straightened things out with the rightsholders without messing up Kindle owners, and chose not to. "Amazon has just proven that it can take seemingly random actions that result in bad things happening to innocent people. And you're going to sell that as a good technology to... who?"
- Bruce Nussbaum was hardnosed about it in a July 19, 2009 post at *businessweek.com*:

"Amazon Blows It With Kindle." He asserts that the culture of readers is "a hybrid owning/sharing culture." Amazon broke one rule by not allowing people to share books. "Now Amazon is breaking the other basic rule—keeping loved books forever." (Typical range of comments. One Kindle owner was considering never "buying" another ebook; three would-be owners decided not to buy a Kindle; and "Jeff" boiled it down to "Grow up you cry babies." I just *love* reasoned argument.)

- Wayne Bivens-Tatum wrote about it on July 22, 2009 in "The Kindley 'Big Brother'" on *Academic Librarian*. He got email promoting another blog entry applying a "Big Brother" label to Amazon—and B-T's not ready to go that far. It's an interesting post; you might want to read it yourself...along with the comments.

It's Not the Product…It's You

Steven Stone reviews Sonic Studio Amarra Software in the April/May 2010 *the absolute sound*. It's a program that only works with iTunes. It costs $995. Apparently it only works on Macs with OS 10.4 and above. It's copy-protected: You get a free download that inserts silence every 30 seconds...and when you send in your kilobuck, you get a *USB dongle* that makes the program actually work properly. (Certain LSW members are now saying "Dongle dongle dongle...")

What does this thing do, on one line of computers with one particular music-organizing system? Supposedly bypass iTunes audio processing and use its own audio algorithms. And add a parametric equalizer.

Not convinced? Here's where Stone really gets to me: "While it might be considered an extreme position, Amarra serves as a crucible for a computer-based Mac system. *If you can't hear a difference with Amarra, your system isn't good enough*." [Emphasis added.]

Funny thing is, lots of folks who've tried the software *don't* hear any difference—and it took a while before Stone heard any difference. But that's before he ~~convinced himself~~ put together *his own high-resolution recordings* and an extremely expensive (I'm guessing) set of hardware. After that, he was a Convert—and if you're not, *it's your fault*. Don'cha love it?

Not worth a separate item, but in another review in that issue, we get this sentence:

> It's also a paradigm of balance, striking a sweet blend of tonality, dynamics, imaging, transparency, where no single criteria attempts to grab more of the attention than another.

This magazine's writers seem to care about expressive language. You'd think they might be aware that there's a singular form of criteria...but maybe not. I'd expect that as a primary criterion for quality magazine publishing.

Pointless Ads

Page 16 of the April/May 2010 *the absolute sound*. The ad shows a bunch of components, each with a model number and nothing to identify *what they are*, much less what they cost. It has a woman holding another component on her open palm and smiling at it in a slightly deranged manner. It has one box with "Thrill the ear. Delight the eye. Please the pocket." on three lines of type, another little box with "EXPANDING HIGH-END PRODUCT LINE: MONOAMP, PREAMP, STRereo AMP, INTEGRATED AMP, MULTI-CHANNEL AMP, CABLE, MSUCI SERVER, CD PLAYER, AVP, AND MORE!" (yes, "strereo")...and a box at the bottom of the page listing various product categories, again in all caps.

Oh, and a phone number for "sales inquiries" and an email address.

What's missing? A company name. Some reason I should believe that a company that can't proofread full-page full-color ads with very few words on them would build its products with more care.

Masthead

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 10, Number 8, Whole Issue 131, ISSN 1534-0937, a journal of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced by Walt Crawford.

This issue sponsored by the Library Society of the World (LSW).

Comments should be sent to waltcrawford@gmail.com.

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ10i8.pdf