Cites & Insights

The Front

The Countries of OAWorld, 2011-2015

It's out! It being the third piece of the *Gold Open Access Journals 2011-2015* trilogy: *The Countries of OA-World 2011-2015*.

This is one where I think the print book is especially nice for comparison and navigation, but experience suggests that doesn't matter a lot.

86 chapters in all, most chapters four very full pages. An alphabetic index of country and region names (123 countries, if I'm counting right–including a few that aren't always recognized as countries).

The 326-page book is free as a PDF ebook or $8 as a trade paperback (with an OA heatmap on the cover). In case you're wondering, my profit on each $8 sale is $0.02—two cents.

As usual, you'll find links to the Lulu ebook and paperback versions and to an identical ebook version at the project page, waltcrawford.name/goaj.html

Words

Catching Up with Books, E and P

January 2014. March 2015. August 2016. Must be time (or a little past time) for another roundup on the situation with ebooks and print books (or ebooks *versus* print books, if you're one of those who still believe it *has* to be one or the other). This time, we'll go beyond the eb-vs-pb discussions to look at a broader range of related issues over the past 16 months or so.

Background

If you want my own stance, go back to the March 2015 roundup, which quotes part of the January 2014 piece and expands on it.

Briefly, I believe that the future of books is healthy and has plenty of room for both ebooks and print (paper) books, but even more than that I believe the future of both media should depend on readers' preferences—not on claims for either technological superiority or That Wonderful Book Smell. But there's an edge to that latter feeling: while it's perfectly fine for you to say (and even believe) that only the words matter, that the physical form is irrelevant, it is *not okay* for you to insist or assume that anyone who disagrees with you is either wrong or nostalgic.

What surprises me is that there are still a fair number of pundits and others who argue that an all-digital future is inevitable, that print books will (or must) disappear, that only that outcome is realistic. You'll see a few of them here, although not too many, as they started to get boring.

Inside This Issue

On the other hand, I don't believe you'll see many here who say ebooks are worthless and either should or will disappear; that stance mostly exists as a strawman argument.

Personally? When I'm reading book-length narratives, I tend to prefer printed books for a variety of reasons. I spend too much time reading stuff online, and for that matter I read the daily paper on a Kindle Fire HD8.9, so settling down with a print book (usually a hardbound, usually from the public library) is a nice change.

We purchased a Kindle Paperwhite a while back; the refurbished replacement for the battery-burning original is a nice device. My wife likes it a lot for book reading, and she's the main user at the moment. But I've used it, and it's certainly good enough: despite the crude layout and uniform typography, it's not an obstacle to being fully involved in a book, at least for me (and her).

Does that mean I'm ready to give up printed books? No—and it should never have been an either-or choice. When we start traveling again, I suspect we'll buy another Paperwhite-equivalent and load

them up with reading for trips. (If it's a cruise, I'll also take advantage of the ship library—after all, I first discovered Discworld on a cruise!)

And when we come back from the trip, I'll probably go back to reading mostly print books.

That's me. That's now. That isn't necessarily anybody else. And if *people* (as opposed to pundits) move overwhelmingly to ebooks, abandoning print books in the process—well, that's how things go. But I suspect that, if that ever happens, it will be a long time from now, quite probably after I'm dead.

Meanwhile, let's catch up—first with three approaches to the e-and-p question, then with other aspects of ebooks and other books. As usual, order within each heading is mostly chronological.

Both!

To my eye, most of these pieces argue—at least in part—for the ongoing health of both paper books and ebooks.

Kindle or Print? Librarians Weigh In

This one's Cheryl LaGuardia's [March 4, 2015](#) "Not Dead Yet" column at *Library Journal*. It's about pleasure reading, and LaGuardia's own preference is clear—but there's a slight gotcha:

> I don't feel comfortable without a book nearby (a print book, that is). And the older I get, the more books I read at the same time; I'm usually in the midst of two or three… Now I read mostly mysteries, which I could argue are, in fact, serious literature, but I don't because then I wouldn't want to read them anymore. I get a lot of paperbacks from Amazon, especially since I recently discovered how cheaply I can get used paperbacks there (I also get lots of used paperbacks from the [Harvard Bookstore](#) in the interest of supporting brick and mortar bookstores).
>
> Then one of my favorite mystery writers released a novella only in a Kindle version available through Amazon. I broke down, downloaded the Kindle app to my laptop, bought the novella, and read it online. For me, it was an empty experience. I didn't enjoy it nearly as much as the print books by this author. The words just kind of lay there on the screen, and I found the glare annoying (I experience this constantly in my work, but it felt worse when I was reading for fun). I haven't bought any more ebooks.

The gotcha, of course, is that she wasn't reading the novella *on a Kindle*. A high resolution non-backlit book-contrast device—oh, hell, let's just say "a Paperwhite"—would make a difference, although I suspect it wouldn't change her (or my) preference.

She decided to find out what librarian acquaintances thought, asking a one-question survey about preferences for pleasure reading. The results: eight people preferred e-devices, 31 preferred print and 19 "indulge in both." (That's 58 total, so figure 14% preferring ebooks, 53% print, 33% both.)

She includes quite a few of the comments she received, and they're revealing. Several use ereaders for travel and paper at home. The responses weren't predictable by age:

> The thing is, I do know who answered what, and I was struck by the fact that preferences definitely did not run along age lines. There were plenty of "young folks" who preferred print, just as there were plenty of "seasoned folks" who preferred electronic or used both. For some, form followed function/environment; for others, one format or the other was simply preferred. I do know what my preference is, but I also respect the differing preferences my colleagues reported. May we all be able to do our pleasure reading—in whatever format we prefer—for a very long time.

Amen to that. A fair number of comments, some adding detail. David Bigwood notes the difference between e-ink and backlit ereaders—and Bigwood's one who explicitly doesn't "find any difference between e-ink and print text reading."

Book It, Baby

Jon Evans posted this [on January 16, 2016](#) at *techcrunch*. It's a strawman piece, given this lead:

> Remember e-books? Those were the days, weren't they? Those crazy few years when the fad of reading on a Kindle swept the nation. Now, of course, that fit of mass hysteria is behind us. E-book sales are [falling](#), down more than 10% in 2015 —[YA down 44%!](#) —while [used bookstores are coming back](#). Yes, that's right; print is regaining its regal primacy; e-books are dead. Right?

So he's responding to stories proclaiming "e-books are dead." Right? Except that *none of the stories linked to says or suggests that*. The first *does* say that maybe print books aren't dead yet, and all of them suggest that ebook sales have slowed, but "e-books are dead" is pure strawman.

The rest of the story is arguing with the numbers—saying that ebook sales may be *great* but they're not big-publisher sales. He's also really pushing the idea that "publishers mostly *want* e-books to fail"—because Amazon. Huh?

As far as I can tell, once you get past strawmen and the like, Evans is saying that books are likely to continue in both print and digital form, and that

what we really need is "a vastly better system to identify the books we will love, without having to invest so much time and mental effort into a book before coming to the conclusion that (for this particular reader) it's no more than mediocre."

Well, there's Goodread, there are Amazon reviews, most libraries (which seem to be ignored in this piece) have readers' advisory services...

P vs E

Marcus Banks posted this on January 24, 2016 at *Marcus' World*—and maybe Banks actually found a live ebooks-should-die strawman. *Maybe*.

He recounts a KQED program in which a school librarian talks about the continuing value of print books for young readers—and Banks agrees that print books probably make more sense for children. But...

> This does not mean this is true for everyone at all stages of their lives. Unfortunately, though, Krista goes there. He pits print books against ebooks in a binary way, with zero sum observations like these: "If the [book] fair was selling books downloaded to some electronic reading device, would the longing and excitement have been the same?" "Recent reports have sales of ebooks down by 10%, while sales of paperbacks are up by 13...Maybe we are all weary of the tyranny of our electronic screens."

Was Krista (the librarian) actually positing that nobody should ever read ebooks? I doubt it, but I can't find the episode to check. The next paragraph is a bit odd:

> Ahem. Fluctuations in sales figures for what is still a very new technology are not indicative that this new technology is doomed. It may well be that ebooks never catch on, but we could also just be in a lull as the next generation of ereader technologies evolves. Print books, which now feel eternal, took decades to become commonplace after the invention of the printing press.

Ebooks already have caught on; I don't think there's any question about that. In practice, Banks himself likes both and says "There is no right or wrong here." He concludes:

> Absolutely -- let children discover the joy of print when they are young with minds wide open. But don't deny them the pleasures of an ebook as they get older and seek to sharpen those very same minds.

If Krista was actually saying that *nobody* should read ebooks, then of course he was wrong. But getting older doesn't automatically make ebooks the preferred way to sharpen a mind. Both should mean both—and that seems likely to be the messy future.

Are paper books actually disappearing?

Rachel Nuwer posted this piece on January 25, 2016 at *BBC Future*—and it's a doozy, especially for those who think I'm engaging in strawman arguments against nonexistent "pretty much all reading will go digital" folks. Nuwer quotes two stalwarts whose own writing I've stopped tagging because it feels too easy: Mike Shatzkin and Robert Stein.

She begins with a historical oddity:

> When Peter James published his novel Host on two floppy disks in 1993, he was ill-prepared for the "venomous backlash" that would follow. Journalists and fellow writers berated and condemned him; one reporter even dragged a PC and a generator out to the beach to demonstrate the ridiculousness of this new form of reading. "I was front-page news of many newspapers around the world, accused of killing the novel," James told pop.edit.lit. "[But] I pointed out that the novel was already dying at an alarming rate without my assistance."

> Shortly after Host's debut, James also issued a prediction: that e-books would spike in popularity once they became as easy and enjoyable to read as printed books. What was a novelty in the 90s, in other words, would eventually mature to the point that it threatened traditional books with extinction. Two decades later, James' vision is well on its way to being realised.

As a science fiction and mystery reader, I missed the memo about novels "dying at an alarming rate," but I'll admit that I would also poke fun at trying to cope with a serious novel on diskette. The last sentence in that paragraph strikes me as nonsensical or extreme, but that's journalism. (U.S. book publishing seems to have stayed within a $26 to $29 billion annual range the past few years, of which perhaps $3 to $4 billion is ebooks. More later.)

Go read the article. Stein is strong on the "just a lull" idea:

> While no one can say with certainty what the future holds for paper books, Stein believes that what is a plateau now will, at some point, return to a steep incline. "We're in a transitional period," he says. "The affordances of screen reading will continuously improve and expand, offering people a reason to switch to screens."

On the other hand, Stein's not apparently fond of books that you read by yourself:

> Stein imagines, for example, that future forms of books might be developed not by conventional publishers but by the gaming industry. He also envisions that the distinction between writer and reader will be blurred by a social reading experience in which authors and consumers can digitally interact with

each other to discuss any passage, sentence or line. Indeed, his latest project, Social Book, allows members to insert comments directly into digital book texts and is already used by teachers at several high schools and universities to stimulate discussions. "For my grandchildren, the idea that reading is something you do by yourself will seem arcane," he says. "Why would you want to read by yourself if you can have access to the ideas of others you know and trust, or to the insights of people from all over the world?"

I can think of loads of answers; solitary reading is simply different from social networking. Stein doesn't exactly say print books will die, but he clearly regards them as obsolescent:

> "Print will exist, but it will be in a different realm and will appeal to a very limited audience, like poetry does today," Stein says. "However, the locus of intellectual discourse is going to move away from print."

Why? Because Stein says so, and has been saying so for years and years. And then there's this from Shatzkin:

> "I think printed books just for plain old reading will, in 10 years from now, be unusual," Shatzkin adds. "Not so unusual that a kid will say, 'Mommy, what's that?' but unusual enough that on the train you'll see one or two people reading something printed, while everyone else is reading off of a device."

The last part has *nothing* to do with the first. I prefer print, but you can be damn sure that if I was commuting via train I'd be using a Kindle. And, sure enough, Shatzkin throws in the I-word:

> Shatzkin does believe, however, that the eventual and total demise of print "is inevitable," though such a day won't arrive for perhaps 50 to 100 or more years. "It will get harder and harder to understand why anyone would print something that's heavy, hard to ship and not customisable," he says. "I think there will come a point where print just doesn't make a lot of sense. Frankly, I reached that point years ago for books that you just read."

That last sentence is key: what's good for Shatzkin *must* be good for everybody else.

All this print-will-die stuff is in the first half of the story. The second half offers some research-based reasons why printed books just might be legitimately different from ebooks. Worth reading, but I've spent enough time on this piece.

E-books are more than just digital facsimiles, and publishers need to realize that, pronto

If that hardly sounds like a "Both!" title, the URL title for this March 26, 2016 piece by Haje Jan Kamps at *techcrunch* is worse: "will nobody think of the trees."

And indeed Kamps does say ereaders are "great for fiction"—but there's something more going on here, as in a discussion of travel books that says ebooks don't really work that well:

> Take travel books for example. When trekking across the globe, lugging around four-and-a-half pounds worth of guide books is an utter pain in the arse. Loading a shelf's worth of travel books onto an e-reader makes a lot more sense.

> "E-books for the win," I hear you whisper. But alas, the challenge isn't the weight, but rather the way travelers use guide books. When on the road, you'll forever find yourself flipping between overview maps, local maps, the "what to do" section for where you are, the "where to stay" section for where you're going, the "I'm hungry but we're running behind schedule so we are not where we planned to be" pages and the "oh no, somebody nicked my passport, now what the hell do I do?" chapter.

> It isn't really e-books' fault that they're occasionally frustrating. It turns out that physical paper books actually have a tremendously efficient user interface. You can use fingers or Post-it notes as bookmarks and flip back and forth between sections faster than you can with any other technology. You can write notes in the margin. You can circle, highlight and rip out pages if you want. You could even do what a friend of mine did in an effort to save weight: cut apart half a dozen Lonely Planet guides and gaffer-tape them back together into a customized travel itinerary.

Realistically. Kamps is calling on writers and publishers to make ebooks work better—but, well, there's still something there.

Chill. It's Not Books vs. Amazon. You Can Have Both!

I rarely cite *Wired*, but this title—for a Davey Alba piece on April 14, 2016—is too good to pass up. It's not a bad piece, even if Alba does need to mock a strawman, turning the *New York Times'* "Print is Far from Dead" into "Print is back, ebooks are dead!" (I read through the *NYT* story: *not once* does it either say or suggest that "ebooks are dead." But, well, strawmen are so much fun…)

After that nonsense, things get better:

> Print books have persisted, but ebooks are not going away. Amazon is powerful, but physical bookstores are still here. The book is not immune to the powerful digital forces that have re-shaped so much of the rest of the world. At the same time, books have been able to resist the forces of change because books really are different.

> For so long, the prevailing narrative held that the digital revolution would completely upend books

and bookstores—especially with the introduction of the Kindle in 2007 and the iPad in 2010. Just yesterday, Amazon announced the Kindle Oasis, which looks to be another successful e-reader for the company. But the digital transformation of the book industry has been markedly different from the transformation of other media industries.

"For many people, digital books are not a directly substitutive experience," says Michael Cader, founder of book industry newsletter and website Publishers Lunch. In other words, an ebook doesn't offer the same experience the way a digital file streamed through headphones is essentially the same, whether it's from a CD or Spotify.

"Physical books are … closer to perfect and affordable technology," Cader says. "The printed book is much, much older than other types of media, and it revolutionized modern society. There was very little about it that needed to be reinvented."

There's quite a bit more here, and it's generally good.

Ebooks Rule!

Now on to some commentaries that seem to suggest that ebooks will or should take over.

Keep the Library, Lose the Books

This September 15, 2015 essay by Adrienne LaFrance at *The Atlantic* is an oddity, overinterpreting one Pew survey (not linked) as meaning that people are using libraries less and less and going *way* beyond that. (Wouldn't it make sense to balance Pew's survey of a thousand or so people, with what might or might not be leading questions, with the readily available *actual statistics* on public library usage?)

Overall, perhaps people aren't visiting libraries as much because their relationship to the printed word, still a library's core offering, is dramatically changing.

That shift was reflected in Pew's findings. For example, nearly one-third of respondents who were 16 and older said libraries should "definitely" remove public access to some of their print books and stacks in order to free up space for technology hubs and other more customizable workspaces like reading spaces and meeting rooms. Many more were open to the idea: 40 percent of those surveyed said libraries should "maybe" reconfigure space to include fewer printed books. On top of that, almost half of those surveyed said libraries should "definitely" make 3-D printing technologies available to patrons who want to use them to make their own objects.

It gets worse:

What, then, does the library of the future look like? Maybe not as different from today as it sounds. Today's libraries are already community spaces with rooms full of books and machines—many libraries have printers, copiers, computers, and microfiche terminals. But if the trend in American libraries is toward relative booklessness, when—and how quickly—do print volumes become searchable or downloadable only online? Perhaps the library of the future will consist of five coffee-shop-sized locations spread across a town, instead of one larger, centralized building. These physical spaces would become the main draw of a library; the books people want to check out would all be available to download from anywhere with an Internet connection.

And there it is: all books *should* be ebooks, so public libraries can turn into coffeeshops. Brilliant.

The ebook is dead, long live the ebook

Molly Flatt on December 8, 2015 at *The Memo*—and toward the end of this British piece, it appears that it could equally belong in "Both!"

Of course the title is a strawman, "refuting" the "ebooks are dead" claim that nobody appears to be making, but this report claims that the leveling-off or fall of ebook sales was just a little blip. After all, the CEO of Kobo says there's plenty more disruption to come. Then there's this:

As he points out, there are plenty of alternative stats which suggest that ebooks are still pioneering mountainous change for the industry rather than languishing in a plateau. A recent PwC Media trend report called 'Ebooks on the rise' predicted that ebooks will make up 50% of the $21 billion US trade book market by 2016, while at the start of this year, Apple claimed that its iBooks platform was gaining a million new users a week.

Huh. So ebooks should be a $10.5 billion market *already* ("by 2016"), with print books down by half? I don't think so… (see "Sales" later).

The Deep Space of Digital Reading

Paul La Farge's January 7, 2016 essay at *Nautilus* purports to tell us "Why we shouldn't worry about leaving print behind" (the tease)—and it's *not* that we maybe won't leave print behind. As I read the longish piece, La Farge seems not even to *consider* the possibility that print could not only survive but be better for some purposes.

Nope. He's attempting to demonstrate that claims that we (at least some of us) read more deeply in print form are either wrong or irrelevant. Oh, and here's a hypertext novella that shows how much *better* digital reading will be…

It's true that studies have found that readers given text on a screen do worse on recall and comprehension tests than readers given the same text on paper. But a 2011 study by the cognitive scientists Rakefet Ackerman and Morris Goldsmith suggests that this may be a function less of the intrinsic nature of digital devices than of the expectations that readers bring to them. Ackerman and Goldsmith note that readers perceive paper as being better suited for "effortful learning," whereas the screen is perceived as being suited for "fast and shallow reading of short texts such as news, e-mails, and forum notes." They tested the hypothesis that our reading habits follow from this perception, and found it to be correct: Students asked to read a text on-screen thought they could do it faster than students asked to read the same text in print, and did a worse job of pacing themselves in a timed study period. Not surprisingly, the on-screen readers then scored worse on a reading comprehension test.

If those same students expected on-screen reading to be as slow (and as effortful) as paper reading, would their comprehension of digital text improve? A 2015 study by the German educator Johannes Naumann suggests as much. Naumann gave a group of high-school students the job of tracking down certain pieces of information on websites; he found that the students who regularly did research online—in other words, the ones who expected Web pages to yield up useful facts—were better at this task (and at ignoring irrelevant information) than students who used the Internet mostly to send email, chat, and blog.

I see apples and oranges here: the idea that people who regularly research online are likely to be better at online research than those who don't has *nothing* to do with whether online reading works differently than print reading. As for the Ackerman/Goldsmith 2011 study, it doesn't speak to the whole set of other studies and preferences.

There's more here. It appears that La Farge thinks novels should really be games, which would be far "more pleasurable." Maybe I'm missing something.

For some reason, Diigo tags this piece as "Do You Read Differently Online and in Print?" I don't believe La Farge has answered that question, although I suspect he thinks so.

Where the #$@&%! are all the books?! On my Kindle.*

Lance Ulanoff starts this February 14, 2016 *Mashable* piece with an almost perfect pair of paragraphs:

> People love physical books. They even prefer them over ebooks. Studies say this and bibliophiles believe it.

> But it's just not true. Ebooks, whether on an ereader, an iPad or a smartphone, are a vastly more convenient experience than physical books and are most certainly the way of the future.

I read the rest of the opinion piece for some evidence to back up Ulanoff's absolute certainty. As far as I can tell, it boils down to "It's true because Inevitable and because I say it's true." Oh, and because most people reading while they commute are sensible enough to read on a tablet—therefore nobody really reads print books anymore.

We also learn that today's college students are the last ones using books—after all, kids do all their studying on tablets and surely never read print books for pleasure. And Ulanoff finds ebooks ever so much better in every respect… His answer to studies showing that many people prefer to read in print? Ulanoff knows better: "Ebooks are, in fact, a better reading technology than print. Period."

He sees a "war on digital":

> It can seem, at times, like paper books are winning the war on digital. There are still bookstores and publishers that are putting out hundreds of books a month. There are people standing in line, clutching precious tomes as they wait for their favorite author to sign them. There are coffee table books that people love to buy and put on their coffee tables – more decoration than information…

> So you go ahead and wrap yourself up in all the false hope you need. You tell yourself that books, your favorite 400-year-old technology, are forever and that digital ebooks will ultimately be remembered as a failed experiment.

> You will be wrong, of course. Just look all around you. The writing is on the digital wall.

The top comments are pretty consistent (although others aren't). I especially like Vickie Wilson:

> A very well written article, presuming your goal was to gain lots of conversation about how you're wrong so you look more popular. Congratulations.

As far as I can tell, *Mashable* is All About the Eyeballs, so maybe that *was* Ulanoff's intent.

Imagine If Ebooks Came First

This June 8, 2016 essay by Tim Challies at his eponymous blog is fun, but it also relies heavily on the notion that people only prefer print books because they're *afraid* of ebooks:

> To understand some of the fear and criticism directed toward digital reading, we need to first understand the way we tend to relate to new technologies. We do not take any new technology on its own terms, but always in comparison—in comparison to what was dominant

before it. In this way the old technology always has the upper hand and we consider it superior until the contender proves itself. You and I were born into a world dominated and shaped by the printed book. For this reason we are naturally inclined to consider it superior to all that has come before and all that will come after. We are disinclined to see the strengths of any new and competing medium, for to do that we must first admit the weaknesses of the old. This is especially difficult for a medium as important and well-loved as the book.

After that, it's an amusing piece. But there's the final paragraph:

For the first time in 500 years the printed book has found a worthy rival in the ebook. One will eventually inevitably emerge the winner. For what it's worth, I think it will be a protracted battle that will eventually see the ebook vanquish its predecessor. Until then, we all have the joy and responsibility of assessing both, appreciating both for their varied strengths and weaknesses, and enjoying both grow stronger through the competition.

Why is that second sentence true? What's inevitable about it?

Paper Rules!

Here's where I would slot any commentary that claimed ebooks were dead, with only print books surviving. But I don't seem to have such items, not without violently misreading some of what follows. These are really items that say print books will *and should* continue to be relevant for a very long time.

Paper Books Will Never Die

So says Matt Novak in a January 23, 2015 piece at *Gizmodo*—hardly a hangout for technophobes.

After eight years of writing about past visions of the future, I've learned to never make predictions of my own. But I'm about to break my own rule because I'm just so damn confident in my prediction: Paper books will never completely disappear.

Okay, I'm going to almost immediately hedge and say that I can't get behind the concept of "never." Never is a long time. So for lack of a better way to measure, how about we call it within your grandkids' lifetime? Because after your grandkids are dead nobody you know or care about will still be alive. That puts us at about a century out. And since I've got maybe 30 or 40 good years left on this planet if I'm lucky, a century is basically forever for me.

So how can I be confident that paper books are going to be with us for a long time to come? First of all, because they're lovely and I refuse to believe they'll

ever disappear. But also because paper books are still a fantastic and irreplaceable piece of technology.

He offers some specifics: 92% of college students preferred paper books to ebooks in one survey, paper books don't have DRM, etc. Also this:

It's so easy to think of technological media progress in linear terms. As I mentioned in my post earlier this week about the long forgotten experiments of radio faxpapers, the popular narrative goes something like this: First there were newspapers, then radio made them obsolete, then TV made radio obsolete, and then the web made TV obsolete. This is generally how we prefer to understand the evolution of mass media. But, of course, it's dead wrong.

We still have newspapers, radio, and TV. But with the emergence of each new technology, those older modes were forced to adapt—to refocus on the features that new technologies couldn't offer. It happened for newspapers, radio, and TV, and it's happening for books printed on paper and bound together. That's not to say that ebooks aren't superior in some ways. Rather, that one mode of technology has sharpened the utility of another.

Sure, this one's *explicitly* "both!" but it's a nice commentary from a techie.

Lots of comments, including at least one "buggywhip" one and several that assert that because *they* don't see any difference, therefore nobody does. And those who argue that the newer always replaces the older, end of discussion—and either didn't read Novak's commentary on that falsehood or have the believer's response to awkward facts.

Why digital natives prefer reading in print. Yes, you read that right.

Michael Rosenwald wrote this on February 22, 2015 at the Washington *Post*.

Frank Schembari loves books — printed books. He loves how they smell. He loves scribbling in the margins, underlining interesting sentences, folding a page corner to mark his place.

Schembari is not a retiree who sips tea at Politics and Prose or some other bookstore. He is 20, a junior at American University, and paging through a thick history of Israel between classes, he is evidence of a peculiar irony of the Internet age: Digital natives prefer reading in print.

"I like the feeling of it," Schembari said, reading under natural light in a campus atrium, his smartphone next to him. "I like holding it. It's not going off. It's not making sounds."

That's the lead for a story that shows some research and at least one book on the subject. One item surprised me:

A University of Washington pilot study of digital textbooks found that a quarter of students still bought print versions of e-textbooks that they were given for free.

Given other statements that publishers are trying to *prevent* a shift to ebooks, consider this:

It can be seen in the struggle of college textbook makers to shift their businesses to more profitable e-versions. Don Kilburn, North American president for Pearson, the largest publisher in the world and the dominant player in education, said the move to digital "doesn't look like a revolution right now. It looks like an evolution, and it's lumpy at best."

There's more here, and it's good—including some questioning as to whether moving K12 education to tablets is necessarily a good thing.

Future reading

The URL title for this Craig Mod essay on [October 1, 2015](#) at *aeon* is "stagnant and dull can digital books ever replace print." (It's 4,400 words long: *aeon*'s design makes that easier to find than the date.) Mod definitely gave ebooks a try:

From 2009 to 2013, every book I read, I read on a screen. And then I stopped. You could call my four years of devout screen-reading an experiment. I felt a duty – not to anyone or anything specifically, but more vaguely to the idea of 'books'. I wanted to understand how their boundaries were changing and being affected by technology. Committing myself to the screen felt like the best way to do it.

He started with an original Kindle, clunky by today's standards but a direct descendant of Alan Kay's Dynabook. And Mod's initial reaction was: "I was in love."

Mod liked the Kindle a lot, and he says why with some eloquence, and why it's important (in his view) to treat new technologies optimistically.

But in the past two years, something unexpected happened: I lost the faith. Gradually at first and then undeniably, I stopped buying digital books. I realised this only a few months ago, when taking stock of my library, both digital and physical. Physical books – most of all, works of literary fiction – I continue to acquire voraciously. I split my time between New York and Tokyo, and know that with each New York trip I'll pick up a dozen or more volumes from bookstores or friends. My favourite gifts, to give and to receive, are still physical books. The allure of the curated front tables at McNally Jackson or Three Lives and Company is too much to resist.

That's just a small piece of a long, thoughtful discussion by a writer who would really *like* to prefer ebooks, I think.

Why the Printed Book Will Last Another 500 Years
Adam Sternbergh posted this on October 14, 2015 at *Literary Hub*. The tease: "The future of reading came and went." After an intro on why he assumed record stores would *of course* close—after which he wondered whether that might also be true of bookstores—he cites one of the newspaper stories about the resurgence of print and slowing of ebook sales and found it heartening.

I'm heartened in part because I'm convinced these are positive goods for the world. And I'm heartened because this reversal seems to confirm a theory I've long held but have been frankly too frightened to fully embrace.

The theory is this: Maybe books are different.

I mean, books *are* different. That's obvious. People collected records and CDs, and they used to stash physical photos in albums as keepsakes, but among cultural artifacts, books are the one physical package that we proudly retain, archive and display. More than that, the experience of a book—of receiving what a book has to offer through the physical medium of the book itself—is much different than, say, the experience of receiving what a song has to offer through the physical medium of the vinyl 45, or the cassingle, or the shiny CD, or the MP3. Whatever medium the music is delivered in, the song remains the same—once it gets to your headphones, it doesn't really matter what form it arrived in (esoteric preferences for the "warmth" of vinyl notwithstanding).

It's different when you read a book. When you read a physical book, or you read an e-book, the physical experience of reading that book is different. It looks different. It feels different. It even smells different. Your memory of having read it will be different. Unlike music, food, or paintings, you can choose what head-hole to put a novel in: You can put it in your eyes (by reading it) or in your ears (by listening to the audiobook). You can read it on a screen, on which each "page" pops up in a kind of context-free procession toward infinity, with no physical referents as to how many pages have already passed and how many are yet to come. All books—all text—start to feel the same, as though dredged up from a vast grey ocean of pixels. Or you can read *the exact same book*—the same words, the same story, the same ideas, the same emotions—on paper, bound between covers, where you physically sense the heft of what you've read and of what you have yet to encounter. Where you can close the book with a satisfying thud when you are finished. Those are two very different experiences of the same book.

Personally, I sort of wish he'd left out that "smells" part, because it's too easy to dismiss print lovers as

"booksmellers" and because I don't find that new trade paperbacks have much of any smell. (Some older library books do, but I read them *in spite of* that particular book smell.) The rest of the paragraph makes sense to me.

One comment says "I think there's room for both"—and I don't believe Sternbergh is denying that so much as he's denying that there's *only* room for ebooks. Then there's this classic comment:

> It is too bad for your 'romantic self' that the report in the NYT was bullshit based on data that exclude a huge portion of ebook sales. As for print books, they'll no doubt stick around for a long time as will their footprint from the tree logging, paper bleaching, fossil fuel using to haul them from mill to printer to bookstore to landfill.

Wow.

5 Reasons Physical Books Might Be Better Than E-Books

As listicle-oriented websites go, *Mental Floss* is better than most, but this Shaunacy Ferro piece from [October 2, 2015](#) is still mostly useful for the tl;dr crowd—like most listicles, it's short. (And you don't have to put up with a separate page and adfest for each item.)

The five items, each with a paragraph or so of explanation: Ebooks can reduce reading comprehension; Young kids can get distracted by ebooks; You remember less about a book's timeline; They're not great as textbooks; They're tiring.

There are, to be sure, "however"s for most of those, and the piece most definitely is not anti-ebook. Lots of pushback in the comments—some of it reasonable, some maybe not so much (e.g., the person who assumes that any study finding print books superior must have been paid for by a publisher).

Sales and Statistics

Let's look at a few items and commentaries on sales figures for ebooks and print books, recognizing that some figures will leave out substantial quantities of indie and Amazon-only material. Many of these spring from what I'm calling That NYT Article—another link to it appears below—and I'm omitting some commentaries that are either too repetitive or too conspiracy-minded for my taste.

eBook Sales and Author Incomes and All That Jazz

How better to begin than with this [September 23, 2015](#) John Scalzi essay at *Whatever*, given that he earns his very good living as a fiction writer, he's been exceptionally candid about his own sales, and he's generally full of good sense.

His essay is prompted by people asking his thoughts on [That NYT Article](#)—by now, you should know which one I mean. A few of his notes (but the whole essay is worth reading):

> To begin, I think it's lovely that print sales and book stores are doing well; it was touch and go there for a while. I'm also not entirely surprised to find that many younger readers — the "digital natives" — like and often prefer physical books. That's certainly been the case with my daughter (who now, as it happens, works at the local bookstore). She's sucked into her phone as much as any person her age, or indeed, as much as most people alive, it seems. And yet, when she reads books, and she reads a lot of them, print is her preferred medium, and was even before the bookstore…
>
> First, if we are talking overall book sales, I do think we're missing a lot if we're not bringing indie sales into the discussion. There's a hell of a lot going on there and it's one of the most exciting places in publishing right now, "exciting" being used in many senses of the term. But no matter how you slice it, if you're lightly sliding over its existence, you're not accurately describing the current publishing market.
>
> But, second, I don't think declining eBook sales from publishers means they're doomed, *doomed*, either. This is in part because (and this seems to be a point of some confusion) there's more to publishing than maximizing eBook sales numbers in the short term. Publishers, for example, might decide that it's in their long-term interest to stabilize and even grow the print market, and price both their eBooks and print books in a manner that advantages the latter over the former in the short term…

[Because Amazon, among other things]

> Note well that publishers have not been idle addressing the digital-only market; numerous publishers now have digital-only (or "digital-first" with publish-on-demand print option) imprints, and several, including Tor, my primary fiction publisher, have started imprints devoted specifically to novellas, a format that is now emerging from a long commercial slumber thanks to digital formats. I think it's entirely possible that publishers have as their long-term strategy imprints and initiatives that primarily address particular media, with some imprints, books and authors primarily digital-facing and some primarily print-facing, depending on where their data tells them money is to be made with each book/author/imprint/whatever.

There's an interesting discussion of author income (and a self-serving Authors Guild survey) and different streams for such income. Then:

I've noted before that I think in general there are three kinds of authors: Dinosaurs, mammals and cockroaches, where the dinosaurs are authors tied to an existing publishing model and are threatened when it is diminished or goes away, mammals are the authors who rise to success with a new publishing model (but who then risk becoming dinosaurs at a later date), and cockroaches are the authors who survive regardless of era, because they adapt to how the market is, rather than how they want it to be. Right now, I think publishing might be top-heavy with dinosaurs, and we're seeing that reflected in that Author's Guild survey.

Whatever tends to get good comments; this post has 118 of them. In this case, Scalzi's lead comment to set the stage deserves quoting nearly in full:

> Before I am yet again accused of being insensibly anti-Amazon/pro-publisher, as I often am with posts like this, a reminder that Amazon *is* one of my publishers, specifically of my audiobooks via Audible, with whom I now have a very long-term contract. I think they have done a lovely job with my work, which is why I have a long-term contract with them. Also note that I do not believe publishers are paragons of virtue. In both cases they are businesses acting primarily in their own self-interest, and that interest may or may not be the same as either authors' or consumers' self-interest.

> (Note also this piece does not discuss audiobooks at all as a market, which I personally am finding a hugely significant piece of my writer income these days. It's a whole other ball of wax, so to speak.)

> Likewise anyone who believes I am insensibly anti-self/indie publishing needs a refresher course on how I broke into publishing in the first place. Indie/self publishing offers a number of advantages and a number of disadvantages — strangely, like any other method of publishing. It will be good for some people/projects and not good for others. People who like to pretend there is a great war between publisher and indie/self-pubbed folks I tend to find tiresome.

> Also, discussions of what eBook prices "should" be based on manufacturing costs should be avoided, because they're pointless and stupid and boring.

Just as a reminder: my best estimate is that no more than 14% (one-seventh) of the *price* of a typical book can be attributed to all "physical" aspects—printing, binding, shipping and warehousing. I've never seen any figures suggesting a higher percentage; I've seen many suggesting that it's lower for all but very short-run books. So a purely rational pricing scheme would have ebooks cost 14% less than print books—and I don't think that would please most "ebooks *should* be

cheap" folks. (*Of course*, at least one commenter misread that last paragraph as saying "don't complain about ebook prices"—even Scalzi's audience sometimes has selective literacy.)

I won't quote from comments in general—too many of them—but Jason Gilbert (who works for a business publisher) offers a very level-headed commentary (about halfway through the comments) with four major points, all worth reading (including the note that *print* production costs have been falling), and beginning with this, based partly on that publisher's own figures:

> 1. The trend isn't so much eBooks down as it is eBooks not rising as rapidly as they have been, and print not declining as much as it had been. (Or as much as we might have forecast.) People like print for lots of different reasons, **and my seat-of-the-pants guess is that eBooks have been around long enough now that readers' habits have settled in and the ratio of electronic-to-print is reaching something like an equilibrium**. [Emphasis added.]

Actually, a science fiction editor made a similar point in the story itself: "A publisher's take: ebook sales inflated as people bought up backlist releases. Now down to more realistic levels overall."

OK, so I can't resist Matthew Ernest's one-line comment:

> It's like how photography meant the end of painting, i.e. not at all.

Kat Goodwin also adds several detailed, knowledgeable comments, as does "E." We're reminded *why* trade paperbacks are frequently cheaper on Amazon than ebooks (thanks to court orders, Amazon can't reprice major-publisher ebooks but can sell print books at a loss if it chooses)…and, well, this long, *long* set of comments is so good and adds so much to the essay itself that I read through the whole damn thing. And suggest that you do the same—noting as you do that it all happened in less than ten days, *Whatever*'s cutoff for comments.

If you tally up reading preferences in the comments you'll find mostly "both" (I think) and a fair number of "ebooks because we have 10,000 [or whatever] print books and no *room* for more."

The plot twist continues, eBooks sales aren't really slipping, but traditional publishers might be

Another commentary on That NYT Piece, this one by Martin Kalfatovic at *UDC 793 travel. leisure. pursuits* [on September 23, 2015](#)—and it seems perhaps more dismissive than the flawed article deserves.

Maybe you'll be more taken with MK's style than I was. He's almost certainly right that the NYT figures

were flawed and partial, and he's right that declining ereader sales don't mean the death of ebooks. I do generally agree with his close:

> What we're hearing is not the death rattle of ebooks or print books, but the nagging, gnawing, rattling cough that foretells a painful restructuring of the publishing industry that will, in the long run, benefit both authors and readers. There will be winners and losers and I believe books (pBooks and eBooks) will be the winners.

The Death of the Death of Books

Yet another commentary on That NYT Piece, this one by M.G. Siegler on September 26, 2015 at *500ish Words*—and while Siegler notes some of the flaws in the article, he muses:

> But I wonder if there's not something else, something *bigger*, going on here.
>
> While the Kindle was supposed to be the harbinger of the end of print, the iPad (and the other tablets that followed) were supposed to be the stake in its heart. If both of those forces plus smartphones (which, just by virtue of their immense scale, are likely the biggest digital "readers" of the bunch), haven't killed off physical books, maybe they're *never* going to die. And maybe, just maybe, the 20 percent plateau for ebooks is just the new normal.
>
> What if books, unlike various physical forms of music or movies, are the medium that weathers the digital onslaught?

Here's the thing: Siegler *doesn't read print books*.

> I read all books on my Kindle, but I increasingly find myself longing to visit bookstores.

Why is he a digital purist? He doesn't say. But he does seem to think that everything that's going on points to physical books *not* going away or becoming mere *objets d'art*.

Print Book Sales Up Again in 2015

The piece itself is by Jim Milliot on January 1, 2016 at *Publishers Weekly*—but I would be remiss if I didn't credit a February 22, 2016 *Retiring Guy's Digest* piece for pointing me there.

RGD shows two graphs and quotes a single key paragraph:

> Unit sales of print books from outlets that report to *Nielsen BookScan* increased 2.8% in 2015 over 2014, marking the second consecutive year that print units posted annual gains. In 2014, unit sales increased 2.4% over 2013; in 2015 unit sales were up 5.3% over 2013. Total units sold topped 652 million in 2015 at outlets that report to BookScan, which captures about 80% of print unit sales in the U.S.

By type of seller, mass merchandisers (Wal-Mart and ilk) were down 8.8%, but retail and club (bookstores, Amazon, book clubs)—now five times as many sales—was up 5.4%. Both adult categories were up in actual sales volume—and that's the first time since 2010 that *print* adult fiction sales have risen. (Adult nonfiction print unit sales rose from 240.1 million to 256 million—and no, that's *not* all coloring books. I was going to cite an insider's view attacking the resurgence of print as a myth—but since that insider flatly states that coloring books at 12 million sales, up from one million, *entirely* account for an overall 19 million unit increase in adult print book sales, I'm omitting that "expert" debunking: that's eight million books not accounted for, and that's a lot of myth!)

The figures are interesting. At this point, mass-market paperbacks don't amount to much (and they're still slipping): 64 million, compared to 178 million hardcover and 356 million trade paperback. I said years ago that it seemed plausible that ebooks would eventually wipe out most mass-market paperback sales (other than possibly at airports), and that might be right. It might also be irrelevant.

Strong year for UK publishing industry as it grows to £4.4bn

Most of my items and commentary have to do with the United States publishing market—and huge as it is ($28 to $40 billion for books, depending on how you count), it's almost certainly less than half of the worldwide market. And, as this May 13, 2016 item at The Publishers Association website notes, there are other big publishing operations.

> (Amused sidebar: for a long time, the Brits called their national library association The Library Association, although it was much younger than the American Library Association. In this case, TPA is *much* older than AAP, its American equivalent, a mere youth of 46 years to TPA's 119 years.)

Probably worth noting: that £4.4bn includes £1.1bn in journal sales, virtually all online, so the figures aren't comparable. Changes, however, may be:

> Sales of physical books from publishers increased for the first time in four years while digital sales fell for the first time since The PA started collecting figures.

Note also that earlier American figures are volume figures; these are revenue figures.

Nielsen Unveils Book Industry Year in Review

A quickie by Michael Kozlowski on June 3, 2016 at *Good EReader*, with a different set of tracking mechanisms yielding somewhat similar results: U.S. print unit sales, falling from 2010 to 2012, have been rising

since then, with a fairly sharp rise in 2015 to 653 million items—passing 2011 but still below 2010. Meanwhile ebooks as registered through multiple (but doubtless incomplete) sales channels went from 234 million units in 2014 to 204 million in 2015.

> Traditional print books increased almost 3%, while sales of e-books dipped. As a result, e-books' share of the total market slipped from 27% in 2014 to 24% last year.

There are also graphs on how people read ebooks and on price points. As to how: for 2015, not quite 45% on Kindle devices (slightly more Kindles than Fire tablets), 15% on iPads, 14% on smartphones, 9% on Nooks, 6% on computers…

As E-book Sales Decline, Digital Fatigue Grows
I'm citing this [June 17, 2016] story by Jim Milliot at *Publishers Weekly* because it works from an entirely different data source…and because the comments are an object lesson in ignoring what's there in favor of what you expected.

The story is based on a survey by Codex Group of thousands of book buyers (4,992)—not on Nielsen or AAP figures.

That survey found that 32% of the books these folks purchased in April 2016 were ebooks (units, not dollars)—down from 36% in April 2015. That's not a big decline, but it's also comparable to AAP *revenue* figures: 20% ebooks in 2015, down from 23% in 2014. Unlike AAP, the Codex survey included self-published books and those sold in all channels.

But here's what's interesting:

> The Codex survey also found that though book buyers stated they spent almost five hours of daily personal time on screens, 25% of book buyers, including 37% of those 18–24 years old, want to spend less time on their digital devices. Since consumers almost always have the option to read books in physical formats, they are indicating a preference to return to print. In the April survey, 19% of 18-to-24-year-olds said they are reading fewer e-books than when they started reading that format, the highest percentage among all age groups. Overall, 14% of book buyers said they are now reading fewer e-books than when they started reading books in the format, and 59% percent of those who said they are reading fewer e-books cited a preference for print as the main reason for switching back to physical books. The share of print books purchased was also the highest among the heaviest screen users, the so-called digital natives, ages 18–24 (83%), and lowest (61%) among 55-to-64-year-olds.

Then there are the comments, where people parrot the "it's all coloring books" ~~lie~~ mistake and "you're

not including Amazon/selfpub/whatever" and various other articles of faith among those who are dead certain print books are just dying more slowly than hoped for. Most such comments look as though they were written without actually reading the article. Not that I'm suggesting anything…

Libraries

There's a lot to say about ebooks and libraries, but I've generally avoided the topic because it needs to be dealt with by active librarians and because I find it a little depressing. Here are a few random items that may or may not be useful—oddly enough, all of them at least a year old.

A New Year's Vision of the Future of Libraries as Ebookstores
This essay by Beth Bacon appeared [December 30, 2013] at *digitalbookworld*.

> As the New Year approaches, I have a vision of the future that brings bookstores to every town and invigorates libraries. In this vision, libraries of the future *are* our local bookstores. I see a future where libraries let people borrow digital books—or buy them.

The rest of it basically says this would be a great thing and that public libraries have some of the features of great bookstores. There's this:

> Almost every town in the United States has a public library. Right now, these neighborhood centers offer access to all forms of media at no extra cost to individuals. Our libraries quietly serve all kinds of content—from bestsellers and classics to obscure scholarly documents and home improvement manuals—to the kids, students, adults, the elderly in our community.

> Letting libraries sell ebooks can do two things that libraries need now: infuse a bit of new cash and attract the interest of the community's busiest, most productive citizens. I see everyone, from those chasing the American Dream, to those disappointed by it, to those who've ridden the dream to success, all finding the information that fuels them at the public library. My vision of the future may be more of a dream, but perhaps if I share it, the ideas will catch on.

Did you catch that implication in the second paragraph—that libraries *don't* attract "the community's busiest, most productive citizens" now? Apparently commercializing the library is the way to save it.

I turned to the author's credentials. She's written books for children and young adults and "helps organizations large and small define their brands and has a special expertise in helping authors market

their books." In other words, she's a marketing consultant. Who better to push libraries to become commercial operations?

One comment says this would be a "great way for libraries to stay afloat." Another, a former librarian, points out that some public libraries already have "buy it now" links, which at least avoid making libraries directly commercial operations, that libraries are busier than ever—and that "buying" ebooks is an iffy proposition.

But then…

Simon & Schuster Demands Libraries Start Selling eBooks

That striking title appears on Michael Kozlowski's [January 16, 2014](#) story at *GoodEReader*. It has to do with a 15-library New York pilot project involving S&S and Overdrive. The key:

> Part of the new deal with Overdrive is to make libraries offer a [Buy it Now](#) button on their online websites. When patrons visit the online portal to see what digital titles are available there will be a button next to S&S titles to instantly purchase the book. Digital titles are very much akin to their tangible counterparts, where popular titles often have long wait times. S&S and Overdrive are betting on people not wanting to wait and make a purchase.

> S&S mandated that the only way they would participate in contributing their titles to libraries in the US, was that if 3M, Overdrive and Baker & Taylor developed systems that would give people a buying decision. This is in effect blackmailing libraries to either start acting as an online bookstore or you won't be able to get a wide array of tittles…

> Publishers demanding libraries start selling eBooks is setting a dangerous precedent. Libraries are publicly funded entities because they serve the community, if they start selling eBooks or opt into the program to start doing it, it could influence public perception on what exactly libraries are doing in 2014.

"Make," "mandated," "blackmailing" and "demanding" are key terms here, I think. And I think Kozlowski makes a good point.

The Ephemeral Ebook Library

This careful discussion by Sharon E. Farb and Sean Johnson Andrews appeared [June 28, 2014](#) on *medium*. Despite its unfortunate assumption that there's "the transition" to entirely digital (might be true for some academic libraries, and this is primarily about academic libraries—still unfortunate and shortsighted, in my opinion), it's well worth reading.

And maybe that's where I should leave my discussion: if you haven't read it you probably should.

Creating the Future of Ebooks

Another one on academic libraries and ebooks, this time by Wayne Bivens-Tatum on [December 11, 2014](#) in *Library Journal*. He links to earlier ebook-related columns that are worth reading—and in the comments section of one, I find the odd juxtaposition of Rick Anderson asking "Is anyone suggesting that ebooks should completely replace print books in libraries?" and—one day later—saying this:

> Our general policy is that ebooks are our default format, but that we buy print when there's a compelling reason to do so or our patrons express a preference. I can't imagine saying that we would never buy print if the e-version is available.

I dunno. Somehow the gap between "all ebooks" and "ebooks preferred unless you can convince us otherwise" is not comforting.

But back to this particular column.

> Publishers are understandably wary of selling digital rights management (DRM)–free ebooks to libraries, and the patron-driven acquisition (PDA) model some libraries want might not be sustainable for publishers. Libraries are struggling to buy books at all. The library ebook market is in a state of flux. There's opportunity in chaos, though, and the opportunity here is to create a future that's good for everyone, from publishers to library users.

> Some librarians want to reduce what they pay for scholarly books to the absolute minimum. Their preference is what I have called [radical patron-driven acquisition](#) (RPDA): all books are ebooks and are only purchased via PDA. Writers and publishers still think of ebooks as books. These librarians think of ebooks as part of a media streaming service. For some libraries, I suppose, this approach might make sense, but I'm mostly thinking about research libraries. Some PDA is fine, but RPDA is a bad way to develop the bulk of collections at research libraries.

He also recounts Charleston Conference sessions with university press people saying the PDA-and-short-term-loan model doesn't yield enough revenue to make scholarly monographs feasible.

> In another session, the heads of collections and of resource sharing at Utah State University discussed a study they had done about collection development and interlibrary loan (ILL) within the Greater Western Library Alliance (GWLA), a consortium of 33 academic libraries. They found that most of the libraries had significantly reduced their spending on books, although only one library in the system had adopted RPDA. As a result, the collections of the 33 libraries had become less diverse overall, with widespread duplication of core books and many fewer unique items. This had two effects. First, some of the

libraries that had reduced the most had become significant net borrowers within the system (I couldn't tell from the charts whether the RPDA library was the heaviest borrower). The head of collections questioned whether such heavy reliance upon other libraries without contributing to the system was sustainable and whether lending to them could continue. Second, many books that library users wanted weren't available within the GWLA system at all because no library had purchased them. Because of that, the libraries had to go out of the system to get the books, which meant longer wait times and shorter loan periods for the library users.

I've argued before that no library is an island, and that's the sort of thing that happens when libraries concentrate only upon their current users. Because of that narrow vision, *even* their current users are harmed. This future isn't good for publishers or libraries. Every library focusing only on its own short-term interests could eliminate much scholarly book publishing over time, with detrimental effects on actual library users who can't get books and scholars who can't publish them anymore.

There's more to the column. Worth reading, along with the comments.

A Modest Ebook Pricing Proposal
WBT again, this time on June 28, 2015 at *Academic Librarian*, following up on his series of *LJ* columns. He recounts email from a publisher (who offers libraries DRM-free ebooks with unlimited usage) asking why WBT's library wasn't buying the publisher's ebooks.

I tried a public response to that question here, basically saying that libraries generally have to choose a default for books–print or electronic–because they can't afford both for all their titles. It's all or nothing, and as long as people still want print books, I'll keep buying them, which means that I don't have money left over to duplicate each title as an ebook, no matter how great the ebook platform is. It's just too much trouble trying to coordinate with publishers and approval plans subject by subject.

The thing is, I could have the money to do just that, if publishers weren't trying to sell the same book twice, often for more than 200% of the cost of the print book. If the print book is $100 and an unlimited license to the ebook is $150, then buying both would be 250% of the print book price. If the ebook platform didn't meet most of my criteria, I wouldn't even think about buying it. Obviously librarians like me aren't the target customers for publishers who want to sell technologically hobbled ebooks. However, often I would love to have an ebook version of a book, but couldn't afford duplicates for so many titles.

WBT still follows the Accepted Wisdom that "publishing is in transition" (to all-ebook) but says it seems likely to be a very long transition.

Print books are not going away anytime soon. Students and professors want them. Libraries buy them. Yet it's also in everyone's interest to support the development of good ebook platforms for academic libraries, which would be easier to do if more libraries bought ebooks even as they were still buying print books.

During the transition period, I'd like to see book publishers offering the same incentives for purchases as journal publishers did 15-20 years ago when journals were moving from print to electronic. I'd like to see an option for Print + Electronic at a price above just the price for print, but well below the price for currently buying a print book and then buying a duplicate ebook for more than 100% of the print book price. I don't know what a fair price would be for such an arrangement. Journals were often about 10% more per year. Maybe even 20% for the right ebooks. If I had an option like that, I'd certainly purchase a lot more ebooks.

There's more, but that's the key proposal—sort of like the "digital" code that's so often included when you buy a Blu-ray movie, so you can get the "digital" version free. (I scare-quote digital because Blu-ray and DVD and CD are *also* digital, albeit carried on physical media.)

Interesting notion.

Also interesting: there's only one comment, from "josh," and it's such a good "both!" statement that I'm repeating it in full:

"Eventually, there might be a transition from print to electronic for most library books."

I've come to doubt this. E-journals are a case where the electronic format makes everyone happy. E-books are a different phenomenon. Some people dislike them because they have trouble focusing on them for sustained periods of time; others embrace the technology. Studies and surveys I've seen put those numbers at about half and half, usually.

E-books and print books can be conceived of as part of a two-tiered approach. Print books work best for sustained, concentrated reading over hours and hours; e-books work best when you need to find information, consult a reference text, or access only a part of the book. A good library will support both of these research needs.

An e-book/print book bundle as a scalable way for publishers to make more money off of e-books would be great. I know I would take advantage of that quite frequently. But print books are not going away.

Taking paper seriously

I'll close this section with [this essay](#) by Amy Brunvand in the July/August 2015 *College & Research Libraries News*.

> The academic library where I work has an "e-first" collection development policy that reads as follows: "EBooks continue to be our default choice of purchasing, unless print is the only option available please order the eBook."

> A few years ago this policy seemed cutting-edge and was for the most part a minor convenience, but lately it seems like all the recent acquisitions I want to read are ebooks, and instead of feeling happy about how convenient they are, my heart sinks when I find them in the catalog. In order to actually read the book I'm either going to need to waste a lot of time down the rabbit hole of screen reading or request an interlibrary loan and get involved in back and forth quibbling about why the ebook we already had wasn't good enough. Ironically, even though I work at a large research library, I'm spending a lot more time at my public library these days.

> At this point I'm supposed to apologize for being a Luddite in order to reassure all the good folks out there that it's okay to love their ereaders. Well, the fact is, I do use ebooks quite a lot, just not for deep reading, and I'm not going to apologize because the science backs me up.

Brunvand cites some studies and experience, and notes some types of book that just don't work well in eform. She concludes:

> The big problem with an e-first policy, then, is not that ebooks are bad. It is that e-first is a blunt instrument where a more delicate touch is needed. We librarians think we know what it means to build print collections because for a long time print was the only game in town, but in order to build the print libraries of the future, we need to give more thought to what print means in a digital age. Now that ebooks are a valid option, we need to be mindfully deliberate about how we curate our paper collections.

> We can let publishers make arbitrary format choices for us (e-first) or we can decide what we want to buy in paper and why. It's clear that library stacks and physical displays define a certain kind of public space, that printed books support a particular kind of in-depth reading, and that the book itself is a highly adaptable platform for creative design and innovation. So as odd as this might sound, academic libraries need to write new collection development policies that take print seriously. We need to acknowledge and understand the particular qualities of printed books in order to curate print collections that support library missions and values—things like serendipitous discovery, deep reading, community sharing, and Library as Place.

One can't let this go without noting that Brunvand's library is Rick Anderson's library, the Marriott Library at the University of Utah. Anderson felt the need to correct the record, with a comment that is at its heart these paragraphs:

> Amy indicates that our library has an "'e-first' collection development policy that reads as follows: 'Ebooks continue to be our default choice of purchasing, unless print is the only option available please order the eBook.'" This sentence does not appear anywhere in our policies and only partially reflects our collecting policy with regard to book formats. I pointed this out to Amy before the editorial went to press, and encouraged her to correct the erroneous attribution. She declined to do so.

> As it turns out, the quoted sentence came from an email message sent to our subject selectors. I have asked those responsible for that message to correct and clarify it so that it accurately represents the library's format guidelines.

> For the record: **while it's true that our library has an e-first book acquisition policy, it is not an e-only policy. We do ask librarians who request the print version of an ebook to explain why the print version is needed**, but we regularly purchase books either in print or in both formats when doing so seems like a wise investment of resources. (When patrons request print versions of ebooks, we honor those requests as a matter of course.) [Emphasis added.]

So: the sentence as quoted *was* sent to selectors. The library *does* have an e-first policy and expects an explanation for buying print.

> Brunvand responded to his comment. In part:

> Anderson is well-known in the world of librarianship as an outspoken advocate of eFirst policies. He has published many opinions stating that collection development in academic libraries should focus on "just-in- time" and "patron-driven" acquisitions rather than on collection building. I assume he disagrees with the point of my op-ed.

> However, rather than discussing points of intellectual disagreement Anderson tries to deflect the argument by claiming that the quoted phrase "misrepresents the collection development policy of the J. Willard Marriott Library at the University of Utah," even though he agrees that the library has an e-First policy (and I certainly never said that the Marriott Library follows an e-Only policy). Since the quoted text is the exact instructions selectors given, I stand by the quotation as an accurate representation of a collection policy that selectors were asked to follow.

Anderson correctly states that under an eFirst policy format decisions can be made on an item-by-item basis but the policy he links to does not articulate a larger context or any specific goals for print collections. This lack of context means that the library is not optimizing use of stacks space or creating the kind of print collections that would attract people to come to the library-- in short, the policy offers no guidelines about how or why to make such format decisions. Research has shown that print reading and screen reading, while complimentary in many ways, are not the same thing. Library collection development policies should reflect this knowledge.

Marriott Library must be an interesting place to work. But I find it sad that *any* library (possibly excepting a science library) has an efirst policy that requires justification for buying books. Probably a good thing that I'm not involved with academic libraries any more.

Miscellany

A variety of items on various aspects of ebooks, ereaders and adoption.

Ad-driven ebooks are worse—and closer—than you imagine

Here's an interesting (if dystopian) piece, by Dustin Kurtz on October 14, 2013 on the Melville House site (it was on the *MobyLives* blog when I tagged it, but that's been folded into the company site). Melville publishes books—including "Hybrid Books," books that come with keys for expanded digital content. Which has nothing to do with this essay…

Kurtz thinks some folks feel too strongly about ebooks:

> Self-styled 'forward thinkers' love e-books. They love them. They want to marry them. They want to have grotesque half-digital babies with them and grow old with them and be buried beside them in a toxic e-waste grave.

But when some futurists look at ebook possibilities, it can be more sobering—as in this extended quote from a Charles Stross essay:

> In the future, readers will not go in search of books to read. Feral books will stalk readers, sneak into their ebook libraries, and leap out to ambush them. Readers will have to beat books off with a baseball bat …
>
> as the traditional verities of publishing erode beneath the fire-hose force of the book as fungible data, it is only a matter of time before advertising creeps into books, and then books become a vehicle for advertising. And by advertising, I mean spam. …

> Authors, expecting a better reaction from the reading public than is perhaps justifiable in this age of plenty for all (and nothing for many) will eventually succumb to the urge to add malware to their ebooks in return for payment. The malware will target the readers' ebook libraries. The act of reading an infected text will spread the payload, which will use its access to spread advertising extracts and favourable reviews throughout the reader communities. …
>
> Finally, in extremis, feral spambooks will deploy probabilistic text generators seeded with the contents of your own ebook library to write a thousand vacuous and superficially attractive nuisance texts that at a distance resemble your preferred reading.

I'm just quoting what Kurtz quoted; you really should go read the whole Stross essay and the comments that follow it. Meanwhile, some of Kurtz' reactions:

> This is great stuff—the essay, not the spectre of ad-driven authorless ebooks clamoring for your attention—in part because the basis for it all already exists. This is not so much a "what if", or even a "please don't" but more of a "duck and cover."

> We do have more books available than ever before—certainly more than readers could ever need or support. And that's before one takes into account the book-seeker's bane, that insane ocean of 'books' that are simply scrapes of Wikipedia articles or Gutenberg Project files with a cover slapped on them, usually available in digital or print on demand editions.

> And of course advertising in books is nothing new, or even really such an egregious notion. But when those ads are, essentially, demanding and connected and perhaps even—this would not be so impossible given the increasing integration in devices of cameras meant to trace where we're looking—unavoidable, things could get pretty irritating in a hurry.

And, of course, more—all well-written and worth thinking about.

SLJ Survey: Ebook Usage in School Libraries Expected to Rise Incrementally

This report by Karyn M. Peterson on January 14, 2014 at *School Library Journal* is worth noting if only because one article of faith among those who still say print is on its way out is that today's kids never see print textbooks: everything's done on tablets, pretty much everywhere. This does, of course, imply "1:1 schools" where each student is given a tablet or laptop.

> That said, 67 percent of respondents say they currently have no plans to transition from print to electronic textbooks, while 16 percent say their school is considering it. Twelve percent purchase some new textbooks digitally, while 5 percent have a mandate to transition.

Whoops. You mean there are just a few schools out there—call it either 83% or 95%--that still expect kids to (gasp) use physical textbooks?

The survey on which this piece is based adds:

> "There is a duality to reading that today's children are used to," the study finds. "…it's not unusual to hear that many children, tweens, and teens still prefer reading physical print books, even as they do countless other things on electronic devices. The fact that they are comfortable with both formats is useful to bear in mind when interpreting the quantitative results of this survey."

Apparently student demand for ebooks has done pretty much what adult purchase of ebooks has: leveled off.

> Just over four-in-ten respondents (44 percent) witnessed an increase in demand for ebooks this year, compared with 46 percent last year. Only nine percent of respondents indicate a "dramatic" increase in demand. Also of note is that 23 percent of school libraries reported receiving zero requests for ebooks this year.

The article concludes:

> So as the kids born in 2007, the same year the iPhone was introduced, start elementary school this fall, they will likely grow up "ambitextrous," comfortable and open to reading both formats.

The inevitable death of print because kids only read in digital form has been postponed for yet another generation, it appears.

What's the most profitable price for an ebook?

Cory Doctorow raises that question on January 16, 2014 at *boingboing*, and offers some possible answers based on a price-comparison site.

For the U.S., the price that will generate the most *volume* of sales is $1 to $2—but the price that generates the most *revenue* is $9-$10.

Ah, but the figures for the United Kingdom are *very* different: the highest volume *and* the highest revenue are both at price points less than or equal to £1. (Call it $1.55 to $1.65.)

Note that these figures are based on what people did pay, not what they said they would pay.

Why Are Publishers Telling Us E-Books Are So Profitable? Another Book-Business Fallacy

Here's an odd one, by Peter Ginna on June 6, 2014 at *Dr. Syntax*. In a way, it's the flipside of consumer demands that ebooks should be dirt-cheap because there aren't any costs involved.

It comes from the time of the Hachette/Amazon dispute and reports that ebooks were more profitable for publishers than print books.

I believe publishers would have been better served by pointing out, long ago, that the notion of e-books as a magical cash cow is wildly misleading. Because *the supposedly greater profits from e-books—when published alongside traditional print editions—are an artifact of accounting*. The margins that both Amazon and Hachette find in e-books are only as high as they are because of all the resources Hachette devotes to hardcovers and paperbacks.

Today in mainstream publishing, e-books are almost invariably published alongside a hardcover or paperback edition. This means the e-book edition floats on top of a huge investment in whatever that title is, *which in most houses is not charged against the e-book edition.*

Ginna, who's worked for a number of book publishers, details some of those costs: the advance (normally counted as an expense against the first print edition), "plant costs" (copyediting, proofreading, typesetting, design, etc.) charged against the hardcover and marketing costs. For that matter, Ginna makes a case that some physical book costs are also relevant to ebooks:

> Because *the existence of printed books, the trafficking and display of them, is still a critical marketing tool for e-books*!

Maybe that's pushing it, but he makes an awfully strong case for this:

> [I]t's wrong to consider the profitability of an e-book edition separately from an accompanying print title. And it makes no sense for publishers to boast of wonderful margins on e-books, unless they are also going to apologize for the lousy margins they get on print titles.

Comments are a mixed lot, but one key item does come out: when an author gets 12% royalty on print editions and 25% royalty on ebooks, that author is basically getting the same rate—because print royalties are (frequently, typically) paid based on list price, and publishers only get about half of that.

The Back

Another mix of curious items from current magazines and, little by little, catching up on older items tagged as deserving a little casual snark.

Masters of the Universe Go Exploring!

We subscribe to *National Geographic Traveler* and as a result get glossy catalogs full of overpriced trips with the National Geographic label. Those didn't prepare me for one we got a while back: a 28-page slick

color brochure touting "Around the World by Private Jet: The Northern Route."

It's a lavishly-illustrated promotion for a 22-day trip in June 2017. The group will start in Seattle and visit Kyoto and Nara, Japan; Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia; Irkutsk and Lake Baikal, Russia; St. Petersburg, Russia; Bergen, Norway; Reykjavik, Iceland; Ilulissat, Greenland; and wind up in Boston. Basically visiting seven cities overseas, two or three nights in each one, with a team of experts.

The tour's pretty much all-inclusive (tips, drinks, meals, excursions)—as it should be for $71,950 per person (double), or $80,500 for a single traveler. To visit seven cities in far-away places.

Oh, but it's not only around the world: it's *exclusive*—75 passengers on a special Boing 757, the normal version of which holds three times as many people.

A less exclusive traveler with a little more time could see a *lot* more interesting cities for that much money. Choosing three world cruises on three premium or luxury medium-sized or smaller ships, not quite at random:

➢ Oceania's true world cruise takes 180 days and visits 84 cities, with overnights or double-overnights in some of them. $40K, or $80K for a penthouse suite.

➢ Crystal's 2017 South American "world cruise" takes 95 days and visits something like 44 ports; it's very much all-inclusive. $32K for a suite, $78K for a penthouse. Or in 2018 there's a 114-day Pacific exploration with 55 ports: $47K for a suite, $110K for a penthouse.

➢ Nowhere near as all-inclusive, but on Holland America's smallest and nicest ship, a 111-day world cruise visits 36 cities (overnighting or double-overnighting in many) and costs $26K to $68K.

But masters of the universe need speed and exclusivity: never mind the cost. (All three cruise lines mentioned have highly-regarded food and wine programs; the folks on the private jet might get better fare, but I doubt it will be *much* better. I can vouch for two of the three; we haven't been on Oceania. Yet.)

As to carbon footprint—well, hey, it's not as though the National Geographic Society is concerned about the environment, right? Maybe that price includes carbon-offset purchases for using three times as much fuel per passenger as boring old commercial flights. (Cruises are a little worse than planes on a passenger-mile basis, which surprises me and is based on old very rough assertions about cruise lines

as a whole—but considerably better than passenger miles for 75 people on a 757.)

I imagine the 22-day trip will sell out: there are a lot of masters of the universe out there. We won't be joining them.

If You Don't Care, You're Deaf

I've probably dealt with this before, but a December 2015 *Stereophile* "Analog Corner" column by Michael Fremer, this time touting hyperexpensive audio cables—you know, like $24,000 for a pair of 8' speaker cables, or maybe $42,000 for a pair. (Those cables are 4" to 5.5" in circumference—they're *fat*.)

Fremer introduces his discussion by making things clear:

> I feel sorry for the cable deniers, especially those who've spent a lot of money elsewhere in their systems yet persist in believing that wires—especially power cables—can't possibly make a difference. *As anyone who's taken the time to listen will affirm, wires clearly* do *affect the sound*. [Emphasis added.]

There it is: if you *don't* hear a difference, you're either lying or deaf. (Oddly enough, the column says that the $32,000 cables sound *worse* than the same company's $24,000 cables, which Fremer uses.)

And don't think you can get by with cables that only cost a few hundred bucks:

> When someone sends me $500/pair or $1000/pair speaker cables that perform as well as the hideously expensive models hanging around here, I'll be happy to buy them and use them. So far that hasn't happened.

Maybe he would.

Coding Solves It All?

The title on this Mathew Ingram piece at *gigaom* is "Hey Silicon Valley! Not every problem can be solved by giving people internet access or teaching them to code"—and *of course* the suggestion that everybody in Silicon Valley thinks that way is absurd.

Ingram's pointing out a real or possibly-real situation: that some tech folks go a little overboard in touting tech as The Answer.

His prime case is Patrick McConlogue and his claims that homeless people should learn to code. Oh, and look: Ingram *is* stereotyping to an extreme:

> (McConlogue is a New Yorker, but I think his viewpoint is an Eastern extension of a common Silicon Valley mindset)

Wow. "My prime example of a location-based stereo-type happens not to be within 1,500 miles of that stereotype, but he *thinks like them*." McConlogue's thinking is a little odd:

> He says he plans to conduct an experiment in which he offers a specific homeless man $100 or three books on JavaScript to see which he will take:

> "I like to think I can see the few times when [a homeless person is] a wayward puzzle piece. It's that feeling you get when you know the waiter, the cashier, the janitor is in the wrong place—they are smart, brilliant even. This is my attempt to fix one of those lost pieces."

There's a bunch more—and Ingram keeps talking about Silicon Valley mentality *as demonstrated by a New Yorker*. I originally planned to be snarky about attitudes like McConlogue's—but Ingram's sheer tone deafness keeps getting in the way.

John Atkinson's Suspicions

The December 2015 *Stereophile* includes a review by the editor, John Atkinson, of YG Acoustics' $24,000 Carmel 2 loudspeakers. Atkinson also does the sidebar measurements for equipment, and I'm sometimes amused by the verbal gymnastics he uses in avoiding saying that a tube amp is, um, not very accurate after it's gotten a rave review.

This isn't about the review itself or the measurements (he liked the speakers…once he found the right amp, and even then his enthusiasm seemed awfully mild for a $24K speaker), but for this comment within the review:

> If you've been following my loudspeaker reviews for any length of time, you'll have noticed that I almost never use tube amplification. I'm always suspicious that a typical tube design, with its relatively high source impedance, acts as a suboptimal tone control.

That last sentence says a lot. That Atkinson finally used a tube amp for the Carmel 2, to get it to sound good, may also say something.

Monotasking?

I won't be poking fun at *Fast Company* much in the future: my subscription's expired. But this blast from the past—"Monotasking Is The New Multitasking" by Laura Vanderkam on August 6, 2013—is at least mildly amusing. It's dealing with a real issue (that many will always deny is an issue):

> We all know multitasking is inefficient. A classic 2007 study of Microsoft workers found that when they responded to email or instant messaging alerts, it took them, on average, nearly 10 minutes to deal with their inboxes or messages, and another 10-15

minutes to really get back into their original tasks. That means that a mere three distractions per hour can preclude you from getting anything else done.

> Then there's the relationship "inefficiency" that comes from multitasking. You can spend hours rebuilding the good will torched by a single glance at your phone during an inopportune time.

> We know this, yet we keep doing it.

But it's doing so in a *FastCo* way. First, gotta have a neat name: "monotasking." Second: people are *busy busy busy* what with all that multitasking, so call the article a "3 minute read." Third, *make it a listicle*: "six tips" to improve focus. (I know, "focus" is old school compared to "monotask.")

The six tips? Hey, the listicle's really short. Are you surprised that "flow" comes into it (with a remarkably useless piece of advice: "Try to spend as much time as possible in this state.")? You shouldn't be. In all…meh.

But Hey, It's only $4,795.

Back to the December 2015 *Stereophile* and a very favorable review of the Jadis Orchestra Reference Mk II tube amplifier.

The measurements sidebar is…well, I already commented on John Atkinson's ability to avoid undermining his reviewers, even Art Dudley. The unit didn't perform well *at all*—as in 1% distortion with 2.8 watts of output (it's supposed to do 40 watts), even after bad tubes were replaced. Oh, but there's a reason: he had to adjust the bias for the tubes, not at all easy to do with this amp. He still couldn't get anywhere near 40 watts at 1% distortion, but hey, it's only $4,795. His most positive statement was typical of his verbal gymnastics: "The Jadis Orchestra performed relatively well on the test bench, given its circuit topology." Those last four words stand out like a red flag.

Police That Tone!

I tagged this, by David R. MacIver on September 4, 2013, because, at the time, it seemed relatively rare for a man to point out that a woman who was angry about casual misogyny in tech was being criticized for tone, generalizing, swearing and other things that a male commentator would get a pass for.

Now it's a little more common…and unfortunately I think tone policing and deflection and mansplaining and…are also more common. (Remember HRC being criticized for raising her voice on the po-

dium? Remember Bernie and various Repub men being praised for their forceful speaking? The examples are nearly endless…)

He was pointing to a *Medium* story by a woman named Shanley—but that story's been removed, so linking to it won't do much good. On the other hand, his link to examples of various "dudebros" responding is still live.

> You see, apparently the problem with Shanley's post is how *angry* she was. Honestly, it's so unproductive. We men are just telling her to be less angry because we want to help her achieve more constructive results. Don't you know that you catch more flies with honey? Anger is harmful and we don't like it.
>
> This is, of course, complete and utter fucking rubbish.
>
> The tech community *loves* anger. We rant *all the time*. It's a wonderful spectator sport! People find things they don't like and they complain about them. And the rest of us chuckle along at home and nod sagely at the the person who is clearly venting and is expressing the rage we also feel in an entertaining manner.
>
> Think of our angry tech celebrities. What happens when you say "Linus Torvalds is a very smart man, but I wish he'd be less *angry* about it"?
>
> Of course what happens is that everyone nods and agrees with you and says how they're very impressed by all the things he's done but boy his attitude is destructive isn't it?
>
> Wait. No. That's not what happens at all.
>
> Instead they tell you that he's just blunt and direct and he gets things done. What are you, some sort of politically correct corporate weenie who is shilling for Microsoft in order to sabotage our beloved open source utopia? How very dare you!
>
> There are plenty of other examples of lesser fame. There's Zed Shaw, who we all love to hate and sure we think he's obnoxious but hey why don't you read this post by him it sure hits the nail on the head.
>
> Hell, way down at the bottom of the scale there's even me. I'm not without my share of angry tech rants, and people sure seem to enjoy them (for comparison, the angry version of my error reporting manifesto is the one that keeps getting linked to and has at least twice as much traffic as the rewritten one).
>
> We are an angry community. Some of it is real, some of it is for our own entertainment, but many of us are full of anger and it is an entirely normal part of the way we communicate.
>
> But let a woman tell us how our community treats her and people like her and that she's maybe a little bit peeved about how many people respond to her points in *exactly the same fucking way, over and over and over*?

> Honestly. Why is she so *angry*? It must be because she's one of those feminist women! She must have issues! I'm glad us men are more rational so we can respond calmly and point out that she has some good points but could she maybe say them a little more quietly so we don't have to listen and can thus go about fixing the issues! Thanks, there's a dear.

Yep. I'm an old white male no longer directly in the tech game and I'm probably as tone-deaf as anybody, but…yep.

Then there are the comments. All ever so reasonable, almost none actually willing to consider the reality of the message…and, what a coincidence, all by men. Bless their hearts. Hell, bless *our* hearts: I'm certain I'm guilty of this.

Is Hi-Rez Actually Better?

If you're involved with audio, you've doubtless heard of hi-rez or high-resolution sound: digital audio with higher resolution than CDs. (That can mean sample rate—CDs are based on 44.1K samples per second while most hi-rez is 96K or higher—or amplitude levels, where CDs have 16 bits per sample and hi-rez tends to be 24 bit or higher.) This is separate from the issue of whether LPs sound better than CDs, an issue that conflates mastering, resolution (maybe) and quite possibly euphonic distortion. Early studies suggested that 44.1K/16, CD-quality sound, was as good as most people could hear: thus the absurd early slogan for CDs, "Perfect Sound Forever."

I believe most people with decent hearing, decent equipment and full attention can *easily* distinguish 128K MP3 from 320K MP3. It's clear to me that at least one member of my household can distinguish 320K MP3 from CD for solo piano, and I think I can for orchestral music. Once you get past CD, it gets tougher.

The "As We See It" by John Atkinson in the January 2016 *Stereophile* discusses the difficulty of doing blind testing, an interesting topic in its own right. But it also gets to this topic—and statements like one quoted from a reader: "Humans do not hear any difference between 16-bit/44.1/kHz and any higher bit/sampling rate. This is established fact."

It's damnably hard to prove a negative—that *no* humans hear *any* difference under any conditions. I suspect that 95% of us using 95% of sound equipment with 95% of the music we listen to at the attention we provide 95% of the time won't hear a difference—but that's a wildly different statement. (I *suspect*; I don't *know*.)

Anyway: the reader's statement is based on a 2007 study (and some earlier studies). But since then

there have been more studies. Joshua Reiss (Queen Mary University, London) presented the results of a metaanalysis at a 2015 AES workshop:

[A]round 20 of the published tests included sufficient experimental detail and data to allow Dr. Reiss to perform a meta-analysis… Reiss showed that, although the individual tests had mixed results, the overall result was that trained listeners *could* distinguish between hi-rez recordings and their CD equivalents under blind conditions, and to a high degree of statistical significance.

That strikes me as plausible. Does it mean you should replace your CDs with hi-rez downloads? Only if your hearing and attention and equipment and music preferences make that worthwhile. Is it possible you'd hear a difference? Yes.

Six Steps to Punditry

One problem with the delays in using tagged BACK items (clever readers may note that every other item this time around is two or three years old) is that I may no longer be sure why I tagged something. Take "On Becoming a Dangerous Person," a September 4, 2013 column by John Warner at *Inside Higher Ed* that is at least partly about "The Tuition is Too Damn High," a series of essays on college costs by Dylan Matthews.

I don't much care about Matthews or the series at this point (as one who went to UC Berkeley when tuition was $0 and fees were under $100 per semester, I am deeply sympathetic to today's students—of course, back then, California paid several times the 9% of UC's budget it now supports).

Instead, what I find worth noting is a list embedded in the column. The column's not a listicle, not even close, but Warner's takedown of Thomas Friedman's approach to "dangerous-bad punditry"is too good to pass up. I'll just quote the topic sentences; each one has a good paragraph.

Stake out some turf. Simplify the complicated. Make the simplified version fit preconceived notions about the world in general. Slogan-ize it! When in doubt, argue by anecdote. It's better to be certain than right.

It's a little depressing just how applicable those six rules really are.

I'll take "Broken" for $9,600

Art Dudley reviewed the Audio Note CDT One/II and DAC 2.X Signature CD transport and DA processor in the January 2016 *Stereophile.* He loved them—with one possible exception, "I have never heard a CD player that beats this combination in the ability to *involve* me in the magic of notes and rhythms, or that

presents lines of notes in such a musical and attention-grabbing manner." Just before that, he says the musical strengths of the pair are "incontrovertible"—and a bit before that admits that he suspects John Atkinson's measurements may not be great. (Give him credit: Dudley owns up to not much giving a damn about accuracy—he's after "musicality" *as he defines it*.)

Atkinson did, of course, test the devices. Resulting in some of the damnedest graphs I've seen. His summary begins: "Overall, it is difficult to avoid the temptation to describe the Audio Note DAC 2.1x Signature as 'broken'!"

Infographic on Infographics

What I originally tagged was "Why Are Infographics So Popular?" on September 10, 2013 at Stephen Abram's almost-all-infographics blog *Stephen's Lighthouse*—but at this point it's just a link to the original by Douglas Karr on August 24, 2013 at *Marketing TechBlog.*

Karr is enthusiastic about infographics, and most of the piece is a classic infographic: you have to scroll and scroll and scroll to see it all, most of the graphics don't have any graphic significance and it's full of text and numbers signifying very little. This one's also quasi-literate in a way that suggests spending too much time trying to infograph everything. For example:

What is infographic

100 represents peek search interest

Interest overtime

"infographics can shared worldwide in a quicktime"

Never mind. Or nevermind.

Power and Price

Just a quick note on another review in the January 2016 *Stereophile*, mostly of the "if nothing else matters…" variety.

The review is of the Balanced Audio Rex II line-stage preamp—a preamp that doesn't actually preamplify much (there's no phono stage), but offers input switching and volume control.

Oh, and costs $25,000.

It measures well enough. For $25,000, it should.

It comes in two boxes, each 19" wide by 5.75" high—and you can't stack one box on top of the other or anything else on top of them, since they get quite warm—even well-ventilated, the top panel gets up to 113°F. So you need 38" of rack space. (The boxes weigh 40lb. and 36lb.)

Here's what actually earned the non-preamp inclusion here, though: it draws 350 watts. That's a *lot*.

Especially since it's not amplifying or providing source material. (It's probably great. I'll never know.)

Everything!

This one's a little tricky: Mark Chu-Carroll's "This One's for You, Larry! The Quadrature BLINK Kickstarter" on November 13, 2013 at *Good Math, Bad Math*. I'm not going to spend much time on it, but the piece—and the lengthy comments, especially from the would-be author with his theory of everything and threats of libel suits—are certainly interesting reads, especially if you have some grounding in physics and realize just how *well* things like the Theory of Relativity have stood up to experimentation.

I could take issue with Chu-Carroll's putdown of OSI (I worked for an organization that ran an OSI-based network before TCP/IP took over, and I suspect that things are more complicated than Chu-Carroll's version), but that's not the point.

I'm mostly pointing to this and saying "go read it." I will note that the Kickstarter campaign reached $365 of its $15,000 goal. And, I'm sure coincidentally, that a bit later the author self-published a Kindle ebook that explicitly brings God into the picture. That book has an astonishing 5* average rating on Goodreads—which makes a little more sense when you find out that there's precisely one rating, from a person who closely resembles the author.

Just for Fun

I'm not trying to be snarky about this item, the last-page "premiere design" feature in the February/March 2016 *Sound & Vision*; I suspect that the Sony LSPX-W1S Ultra Short Throw 4K Projector is a dynamite device for people with the right space and the right funds.

It's a front projector—suitable for people who want a *really* big screen for TV and movies. It's also 4K, the ultra-high-def resolution that's being touted as the next big thing (if you have a big enough screen and sit close enough to it).

It's also a nine-foot-wide minimalist aluminum sculpture, 21" deep and 10.5" tall. It's *so* short-throw that it only needs to be seven inches in front of a big screen, up to ten feet wide. It uses lasers for light generation. It's also a soundbar—each end is a speaker system (but with no surround-sound or Atmos capabilities).

It's also $50,000, and you can only buy it in one New York City showroom, but it probably is *great* for certain applications.

On inevitability

I can't resist closing with the Library Loon's November 22, 2013 post (title above) at *Gavia Libraria*, and I sure do know which part (or person) of the OA movement is being mentioned here. I'm quoting in full and without much comment:

> "Inevitably, she views matters through the eyes of a Hispanic person."

> "Inevitably, she views matters through the eyes of a queer person."

> "Inevitably, she views matters through the eyes of a white woman."

> No… no… no, the Loon can't put anything in that slot and have the resulting sentence come out as anything other than a condescending assertion of othered hivemindedness. Can you?

> "Inevitably, she views matters through the eyes of a librarian" is admittedly different because librarians do *choose* to be librarians, but that difference is not enough to keep the Loon's feathers unruffled.

> The Loon is an unabashed fan of open access, but this does not stop her sometimes wanting the open access *movement* to go drown itself in a rainbarrel.

100% success for OA is as inevitable as universal prosperity and robust health.

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Masthead