Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large
Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Intersections
GOAJ: Commentary Examples

Subject Supplement to GOAJ3: Gold Open Access Journals 2012-2017 (the July 2018 *Cites & Insights)* closed with the following request for feedback:

> First, for those looking at all the "mistakes" in the article volume tables: Journals were assigned to volume categories (e.g., Largest) based on *peak* volume in any year 2012 through 2017. Thus, it's entirely possible to have three Largest journals with total article count well below 1,800, or even below 600. That methodology is consistent throughout the GOAJ project.

> ➤ Would it make more sense to categorize journals based on the latest year's volume? That's one of several questions I'm seeking feedback on (if there are future GOAJ editions). Others include:

> ➤ Does the split between APCLand and OAWorld (used this year in *GOAJ3* and this subject supplement, but *not* in *Gold Open Access Journals by Country 2012-2017)* make sense, or is it a distraction?

> ➤ For *GOAJ3* itself, is the Visibility measure useless, or should I either retain it or even expand it to a more granular measure?

> ➤ For subject segments, should Psychology be lumped into Medicine, and should Anthropology be treated as part of STEM?

> ➤ Do the publisher categories provide useful information?

Inside This Issue

> ➤ For country listings, should I continue to use names as provided in *DOAJ* or normalize to shorter forms used in *Wikipedia* and elsewhere—that is, Iran, Taiwan, Russia, Macedonia, Moldova, Bolivia and Venezuela? If so,

what forms should I use for the Republic of Korea (South Korea?) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo?

➢ Should the graph of free and pay articles by year be replaced by or supplemented with a table with the same data as numbers?

➢ How about commentary? Last year's subject supplement included my brief comments about what seemed most interesting in each subject's tables—but the room left by removing commentary means that this subject supplement offers more complete country lists, going down to 20 articles for all subjects except Medicine.

➢ Similarly, the last two country-oriented publications have eschewed commentary in order to avoid even longer/larger publications. Would you like to see commentary restored?

And, of course, I'm open to other ideas and suggestions. Send your responses to waltcrawford@gmail.com. There may be an online survey later this year, but that's not certain—and I *do* read comments.

So far, there has been no feedback—and I still need some. (This all assumes that there will be a *GOAJ4*; if there isn't, this is moot.) This odd article focuses on the last two bullet points. That is:

➢ Should the subject supplement include my comments on what's especially interesting about each subject, even if that means briefer country lists or a larger supplement?

➢ Should the country publication include my comments on what's particularly interesting about each country's OA patterns, even if that means an even larger publication?

In both cases, of course, providing comments also means somewhat more work—to recognize what's interesting, write it up, and copyfit so the gain in page count isn't *too* enormous. This year, with a known medical deadline facing me, that made dropping the comments an easy out. In future years, I'm hoping that won't be the case.

The cynic in me says there won't be feedback (although a SurveyMonkey survey might help); the optimist thinks that offering examples of what I would add as commentary might help to shape and encourage feedback. So I'm giving the optimist a shot here. First, comments that seemed worth making on some or all of the subjects; then, comments on a few of the countries. For context, you'll need the source documents, all available from waltcrawford.name/goaj.html.

Select Subject Comments

Biology
Overall cost per article is the highest of any subject. Second-lowest percentage of articles in no-APC journals. More journals shrinking than growing, although overall article count continues to grow.

Medicine
The largest subject, growing slowly. Half of currently-active journals don't charge fees, and three-quarters of the articles in the two most active OAWorld countries don't involve fees.

Agriculture
Strong continuing growth, with an almost even split among shrinking, stable and growing journals. The two most prolific OAWorld countries, mostly non-APC in general, both have fees for a majority of agriculture articles.

Chemistry
Continued growth, but more journals are shrinking than growing.

Earth Sciences
One of the few STEM fields where most articles appear in no-fee journals. Continued growth overall, but more journals are shrinking than growing.

Ecology
Rapid growth, and considerably more journals growing than shrinking.

Mathematics
No-fee journals appear fairly steady, with sharp losses and more recent small gains in APC journals, but most articles are now in free journals. More shrinkage than growth.

Other Sciences
Think megajournals, accounting for the very high average price, the dominance of largest journals and the flattening out of article growth.

Economics
While no-APC journals publish two-thirds of the articles, that's relatively low for HSS (humanities and social sciences).

Education
Considerably more journals growing than shrinking.

History
One very large journal, *no* journals with APCs > $599, and the four largest countries are all entirely no-APC—but the field's shrunk slightly and shrinking journals greatly outnumber growing ones (47% to 29%).

Language & Literature
Considerably more growth than shrinkage (43.3% to 30.4%) and the field's growing as a whole.

Law
Small percentage of APC-based articles even by HSS standards. Overall activity slipped in 2017, and shrinking journals outnumber growing ones (42.3% to 33.3%).

Library Science
Nearly all free (97%), growing (slowly), with more journals growing than shrinking.

Media & Communications
Another growing field with very little APC-based publishing (7%), and considerably more journals growing than shrinking (41% to 27.7%).

Psychology
One of the highest percentages of APC-based articles in HSS, but the trend toward free continues. By far the most expensive HSS articles—indeed, the highest APC-based costs of *any* subject.

Religion
Considerably more shrinkage than growth: 41.4% to 32.5%.

Note
These comments are based entirely on viewing the final results. If I was inserting commentary as I was writing the books/issues, I might have additional working graphs or tables. But the basic question remains: useful or a waste of space and energy?

Selected Country Comments

The most obvious comment about some countries' OA—that none of the journals have APCs—is already stated in *Gold Open Access by Country 2012-2017*.

South Africa
While the percentage of no-APC articles is below average, so is the average APC: about 40% of the global average for fee-based articles.

Bangladesh
The few APC-based journals charge *very* low fees; twice as many journals are shrinking as are growing.

China
Surprisingly few OA journals; average APCs less than one-third global averages.

Indonesia
Rapid growth of mostly-free journals and articles, with exceptionally small APCs where there are any at all. Somewhat unusual in that education outpaces medicine.

Taiwan
Growing, predominantly no-APC, low APCs when there are any—and *none* of the medical journals (which dominate) charge.

Croatia
Croatia's unusually active OA journals are mostly free, with somewhat lower article volume in 2017, considerably more shrinkage than growth (44.7% to 31.8%) and Engineering the most active subject (and the only subject where nearly all articles involved APCs).

Czech Republic
Fairly steady state, more than two-thirds no-fee, relatively low APCs when they do exist; medicine *not* one of the more prolific subjects.

Poland
Large, healthy, three-quarters free OA field, with modest APCs where they exist.

Argentina
Nearly all no-APC and generally growing (but down just a bit in 2017).

Brazil
A major force in OA and especially no-APC OA, growing every year (and with paid percentage shrinking every year). Predominantly university-based. Considerably more growth than shrinkage (41.5% to 30.9%).

Colombia
Other than three small journals with *very* low APCs, this country's growing OA is entirely no-fee and almost entirely university-based.

Egypt
Distinctively APC-based—much more so than most countries—and shrinking over the past four years, with massively more shrinkage than growth (70.3% to 16.3%); notably, all but seven of the OA journals are from Hindawi or Elsevier.

Turkey
Generally growing (with a tiny 2017 decline) and predominantly no-fee, with only one expensive journal. Considerably more journals growing than shrinking (49.3% to 33.2%).

Australia
Growing and still mostly no-fee, but most growth is in APC-charging journals. Balanced growth and shrinkage (43.8% each).

Canada
Relative to population, Canada's OA activity is nearly identical to Australia, and is also mostly free but with nearly all growth in APC-based journals. Growth outweighs shrinkage 42.6% to 34.4%.

United States
No special claims to preeminence: the UK publishes a lot more OA articles and, among countries with more than 50 million people, Brazil and Germany both publish more OA articles per capita (and UK nine times as many). Growing, predominantly fee-based (although most journals are free), with growing journals outnumbering shrinking ones 47.3% to 33%. Medicine isn't the biggest field, but that's only because of megajournals (or, rather, one megajournal).

France
Fairly rapid growth, almost entirely no-fee journals (and the oddity that no-fee journals averaged more than twice as many articles as the few fee journals), all the larger journals are free—and medicine isn't even on the subject list. On the other hand, shrinking journals outnumber growing journals 46.9% to 35.1%.

Italy
Growing slowly; more than three-quarters no-APC.

Netherlands
While there's considerable ongoing growth, it's mostly among APC-charging journals.

Spain
A large and growing OA system that's almost entirely free, with a high percentage of stable journals.

Switzerland
An anomaly: by far the highest article volume relative to population, and nearly all of the rapidly-growing volume involves fees, with a very high average cost per article. That's because MDPI, Frontiers, Karger and Springer account for almost 90% of all journals.

United Kingdom
The largest OA volume (and a high rate per capita), nearly all of it with APCs, which are also higher than almost anywhere else.

Closing Note

So: there are some samples. If you care about this stuff and have an opinion, please go back to the start of the article and send me your comments (waltcrawford@gmail.com).

And here's another one to ponder: Would it be worthwhile to calculate the heat for each country (the OA articles per 100,000 people) before doing the Country book, calculate overall heat for all OA-publishing countries and for each region, and comment on relative activity levels within specific countries?

The Middle
Futurism and Forecasts

Consider this an odd mixed retrospective, combining futurism in general, forecasts, OA-specific futurism and library futurism. In The Middle because it's sort of a muddle. Mostly chronological.

Excuse the snark that may show up here. It takes guts or bravado to do specific forecasts (let's say things that can be falsified within five years) or futurism (longer-term and less able to be falsified). I've rarely attempted it. So, kudos to those who do…even as I may say negative things about some of their efforts.

Start-Up Thinking Is Inappropriate for Libraries

This [March 20, 2014 post](#) by Eric Phetteplace at *PataMetaData* is not itself futurism; it's a response of sorts to Brian Mathews' "Think Like a Start-Up: a White Paper," [appearing April 4, 2012](#) in *The Ubiquitous Librarian.*

So I read Mathews' white paper (and the download figures says it's been read—or at least downloaded—more than 300,000 times!). I admit that I was not inspired, but then I'm not an academic librarian and I don't believe academic libraries are poised to fail. I did find it…interesting…that Mathews chose Xerox as an example of how to use start-up thinking to transform an aging company successfully: at this point, that last word is in considerable doubt. (There's another link to another paper, but that one's on what's now a junk website.)

But back to Phetteplace, and a key statement is the first paragraph:

> **tl;dr**—if you believe your institution is a social necessity, start-up thinking is a terrible approach.

I wonder whether Mathews believes academic libraries are social necessities; my past readings suggest otherwise, but I could be wrong.

Briefly, problems raised are that most startups fail, that they are typically transient operations (remember: most *successful* startups succeed by being bought out), that perhaps libraries should be more interested in long-term thinking than in disruptive risk-taking, and that startup culture tends to be hostile to women and people of color.

> I envision a rejoinder that libraries should praise & emulate the agility & innovativeness of start-ups, focusing on those attributes rather than their ephemerality. Leaving aside the fact that this straw-person argument is basically "but if you only look at the good things start-ups are good," it hints that start-ups are a poor proxy for what we actually want to talk about. I despise poor proxies. They muddle the debate & obscure the underlying issues. To use my favorite example: when we use age as a proxy for technical savvy, we not only discriminate against older folks but overestimate the abilities of the young. So let's discuss "libraries should be agile & innovative," not "libraries should think like start-ups."

Consider perhaps the most common saying associated with startups: Move fast and break things. Is breaking things really the ideal model for future academic libraries?

A random hypothesis

Here's an actual forecast that should be provable or disprovable by now: the Library Loon writing [on April 12, 2014](#) at *Gavia Libraria.* Here's the whole thing: it's short.

> Word on the street is that Facebook is losing traction among youth. The Loon has no direct way to corroborate this rumor, as she is barred

from Facebook owing to her incorporeality. She cannot say she is entirely surprised, however, and if pressed, she would offer the following somewhat broader hypothesis:

Over the next one to three years, there will be a slow but steady attention migration away from wallet-name-required social media toward services that offer pseudonymity and/or decent audience control.

It isn't *just* Facebook's repeated privacy violations. It isn't *just* the new NSA-driven privacy zeitgeist. It isn't *just* the constant irritations and dangers of context collapse and authority overreach. It's all of those together.

The primary losers, should the Loon be correct, will be Facebook, Google Plus, and LinkedIn. Oh, their user numbers will look fine for quite some time to come, as many will feel obligated to keep up appearances for workplaces and family. These sites will lose *attention*, not users, becoming façade-only Potemkin villages. (Google Plus arguably was never anything else, saved only by Hangouts.)

Object-centered real-name sites such as SpeakerDeck and GitHub will likely be fine. (LinkedIn's gradual demise puts its owned property SlideShare in some peril, though not immediate peril. SlideShare might well do better than its parent.) Showing off is a real-named pastime. YouTube, however, which has long had many pseudonymous among its user base, is losing attentional ground to competitors such as Vimeo because of its strengthening policy ties to wallet-name-obsessed Google.

Winners will be Twitter, Tumblr, Pinterest, and perhaps to a lesser extent still-extant blogging services. The Loon thinks there may well be room for more winners; perhaps the app.nets and Diasporas of the world should consider another membership push.

Online worlds are the essence of unpredictable; the Loon will not be particularly surprised to be wrong about all this. But this is the horse she's betting on.

Was the Loon right? Among younger users, quite possibly: Facebook seems to be less desirable than Instagram. But Facebook is now so widely used among all generations and in so many countries that it seems a *long* way from becoming a "Potemkin village."

Doing a little "research" online, and especially comparing Pew Internet figures for 2014 and 2017, I think the case is there at best in a very limited manner. Facebook usage dropped from 71% to 68%, LinkedIn from 28% to 25%, while Instagram did grow from 26% to 35%--but Twitter barely budged, going from 23% to 24%. (A second set of measures looking at monthly usage in 2017 shows 78% for Facebook, 19% for LinkedIn, 29% for Instagram and 34% for Twitter.)

My *guess* is that a subset of younger users actively avoids Facebook and tends toward Snapchat and Instagram (and has probably never bothered with LinkedIn) but that most adults keep using FaceBook and,

to a lesser degree, Twitter. If there's a shift, I'd call it "glacial"—but global warming's speeding up those changes. (Personally? Dropped off of LinkedIn years ago; probably spend more time on Twitter, especially as it's gotten better for coherent threads; but can't possibly give up Facebook, for family and other reasons. But then, I'm old.)

What Will Become of the Library?

I'm sorely tempted to ignore Michael Agresta's April 22, 2014 piece at *Slate* entirely, especially given the tease "How it will evolve as the world goes digital" and this charmer:

> In Snead's era, a library without books was unthinkable. Now it seems almost inevitable. Like so many other time-honored institutions of intellectual and cultural life—publishing, journalism, and the university, to name a few—the library finds itself on a precipice at the dawn of a digital era. What are libraries for, if not storing and circulating books? With their hearts cut out, how can they survive?

That's right: Agresta's one of those who believes that print books are dead or dying, and—it appears later—that all anybody really *needs* is a notebook and an internet connection. He cobbles together some isolated items to make it appear that we have already turned our backs on libraries.

Think I was kidding about Agresta's "all you need is the internet" nonsense? After suggesting that the Library at Alexandria just sort of declined, he says:

> Will the digital age mark another era of decline for libraries? To an observer from an earlier era, unfamiliar with the screens and devices now crowding out printed books, it may look that way at first. On the other hand, even the smallest device with a Web browser now promises access to a reserve of knowledge vast and varied enough to rival that of Alexandria. If the current digital explosion throws off a few sparks, and a few vestigial elements of libraries, like their paper books and their bricks-and-mortar buildings, are consigned to flames, should we be concerned? Isn't it a net gain?

I won't spend more time on this tired "inevitability" futurism. I am reminded why I stopped reading *Slate*…

[As I started editing this, a remarkably stupid anti-library piece appeared in, and was later taken down by, a magazine that calls itself "The Capitalist Tool." Apparently the Libertarian Fool was a step too far…]

What Will Become of the Library?—A response
This piece, posted by Willimen on April 24, 2014 at *Social Justice Librarian* but written by an anonymous librarian, is an odd sort of response to the *Slate* article—especially odd in that Willimen's intro calls the *Slate* piece "an excellent article."

The response is, oddly, mostly about *rebranding* public libraries: the writer seems to think "Social Library" would be a better name than "Public Library." Why?

> I think that the word 'library' should stay, but perhaps 'public' should change. I say this because if you completely remove the word 'library' from the identity, there is the risk of forgetting about the things that libraries have and still offer: Books. When people hear the word 'library,' they think of books. There is nothing wrong with that either. I believe there will always be a place for books in the future of libraries. I think part of the issue lies in the word '**Public**'. There are many meanings for the word 'public'. Therefore, there are differing opinions on what a public library should and does offer. Some people assume that it should be a quiet space for the public, while others use the space in a more social way. With all the variations in libraries (Law, Medical, Public, Academic, etc.), I think it is safe to say that the stereotypical expectation is that they all have at least two things in common: being a place that is quiet, and a place that has books.

> I would propose changing the name to (whatever town) Social Library. My reasoning is this: When I hear 'Social Library' as two words together, I think "This is a place with books, but how can you be social in a quiet place?" This is what we need to happen. We need people to know that we still offer books, but question what else we have to offer, and how these components fit together. This is when we can educate the community on what libraries are all about. We can tell them about the programs, the games, the computers we have to offer. We can let them know that they should not be expect to hear a pin drop everywhere in the library at every moment.

The rest is mostly about the supposed need to rethink the profession (which in this writer's case seems to boil down to getting rid of reference librarians).

I find it especially odd that a call to get rid of "public" in the name of, you know, publicly funded libraries open to the public, would appear in a "social justice" blog, but maybe that's just me. I will suggest that both the notion that "public" is an outmoded name *and* the idea that there should not be any relatively quiet spaces in public libraries strike me as unfortunate, but again, maybe that's just me. No comments on the post. (The blog appears to have gone dormant in November 2014.)

Scanning the Library Horizon

Still on libraries and still from 2014, but an *entirely* different take, in this August 26, 2014 "Library Babel Fish" column by Barbara Fister at *Inside Higher Ed.* Fister's dealing with the notorious Horizon Reports, which I've commented on in the past.

I have not been a great fan of the annual Higher Education [Horizon Reports](#) from the New Media Consortium. They tend to highlight trendy tech in a way I find problematically uncritical, while also making predictions that often fail to pan out. To check that impression, I just looked back at the [2004 repor](#)t, which predicted that within four to five years computers would be so ubiquitous and context sensitive that "the obvious next step is for these devices to become more invisible and responsive to human needs." For instance, "smart dust" could collect data through tiny sensors no bigger than a grain of rice, able to do things like shut off students' cell phones as they enter a classroom. That was supposed to happen by 2009. Though we're hearing the same kind of hype about the "Internet of things" right now (including in the 2014 library-focused report), the combination of techno-utopianism and techno-determinism is a bit dismaying. The [2014 higher ed edition](#) seems a bit more interested in unpacking the challenges we face, but predicts within the next year or two the widespread adoption of learning analytics, the use of big data to "provide a high-quality personalized experience for learners." I hope that will go the way of smart dust, but there's a lot of money pouring into these schemes and not so much going into hiring faculty who also provide personalized experiences for learners. Even in my wildest nightmares, though, as hot a topic as it is, I don't think predictive learning will be the norm for institutions of higher learning in a year or two, though some large institutions [have already embraced it](#).

Remember smart dust?

This column directly comments on the 2014 library edition. Since I'm not in higher ed, I can't comment knowledgeably as to what's happened with all of these, but will quote a bit more:

> It was interesting to see that "research data management for publications" was called a "fast trend," one that is predicted to be sorted out within a year or two. Funders want data to be available in shareable form. For small libraries like mine, this is a new and not-so-simple issue, but it's one that needs solving because our faculty get grants from funders who expect it. So we'll have to figure it out. Changes in scholarly communications and open access to scholarship are expected to take a bit longer. The report's three-to-five year prediction is actually wildly optimistic, considering we've been talking about changes in scholarly communication since, oh, around 1980 in my experience. We've made a lot of progress recently, but it's still going to take time sorting out who will fund open access publishing and whether scholars will accept non-traditional kinds of scholarship.

> …The only things in the report that seem to exist primarily as hype are the semantic web (how long have we been hearing this is right around the corner?) and the "Internet of Things," which is predicted to arrive in four to five years. This prediction is a kind of strange full circle for

libraries since the rest of the report implies that things aren't all that important in libraries these days unless they are digital.

There's more. Worth reading and thinking about at a four-year remove, when you're not busy turning off smartphones with your smart dust controls (and signing up for the Internet of Things without asking hard questions about security and surveillance).

The Library Loon Forecasts

The Library Loon has a history of making one-year forecasts and *reporting* on outcomes—the latter being a bit less common. "Anticipating 2015" appeared December 16, 2014 at *Gavia Libraria*.

I won't go through these individually (because I don't know enough to comment); see the link. In any case, the Loon updates her forecasts:

2015 in review
Also at *Gavia Libraria*, this time on December 6, 2015. She says that three of five surefire forecasts were right, as were three of four "perhapses" and one of three "who knows?"

Anticipating 2016
December 11, 2015. The predictions that I know enough about to even note rather than just pointing to, with my [bracketed] comments:
No-brainers:

- A few formerly-gung-ho MOOC-creating universities will quietly fold their tents. [Remember when MOOCs were the Big Thing in Transforming Higher Education?]

- ISPs will lose their net-neutrality court fight in the US. [Maybe that year, but thanks to the country's lurch toward incompetent governance…]

- More encryption on the internet. Lots more. [Again, not sure of timing…but I know I changed my sites to https: in 2017, and some browsers are really tough about this stuff now.]

- More campus shootings and shooting scares. [Sigh…]

- More Big Deals bite the dust publicly.

Others? Go read the original.

2016 recap
Same waterfowl, same blog, December 6, 2016. Takes half credit on encryption, otherwise all good for no-brainers. Says at end (reasonably, considering that the undermining of America was beginning):

No wishes for the next year; the Loon cannot think of anything that does not come out as a jinx.

But then…

In 2017
In 2017
This entry <u>on December 12, 2016</u>.

> It is a strange and dire time to continue a predictions series, is it not? The Loon considered bypassing this entry altogether.
>
> However.
>
> During her workplace's most recent accreditation go-round, the Loon took on the unofficial job of calm confidence emanator: the self-study *will* be done on time; preparation for the site visit *will* be adequate; whatever happens, we *will* stand up to it. (This in addition to her *official* accreditation-related jobs, as accreditation is an all-wings-on-deck situation.) This may sound anodyne, and perhaps it is, but the Loon thinks it moved things along a few times when they might otherwise have bogged down in recrimination or gloom.
>
> The Loon generally favors moving things along when they need to be moved, and for her part, she finds it easier to do so when she preserves as much normalcy for herself as feasible. Ergo, she will apply her birdbrain to another prediction set.

Boy, can I empathize. I'm near the beginning of a months-long (year-long?) recovery process in which I'm trying to behave as normally as possible, and the fact that *C&I* continues at all is an attempt at a level of normalcy in a time of national madness.

Anyway, the no-brainers for 2018: Net neutrality dead; the OSTP memo on data sharing gets rolled back; Elsevier loses a *big* Big Deal; and, sigh, "More racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-trans campus violence."

An interesting set of Perhapses and Who knows?; read the original.

2017 (and prior years) recap
The Loon went big <u>on December 4, 2017</u>, looking back not only at 2017 predictions but at earlier ones where things turned out as predicted—but later. This one's worth quoting in full, and reminds me why I keep paying attention to a pseudonymous blogger (or bloggers, for that matter!):

> On a whim, the Loon perused *Gavia*'s archives to determine how long she has been anticipating and then recapping yearly developments. The answer turns out to be almost since the beginning—2012! So, because the Loon's crystal ball is often hazy on timelines, she will add a section to this recap discussing earlier predictions that didn't pan out in the predicted year, but have come to pass since.
>
> 2017 first, however:

No-brainers

- *Net neutrality is dead. So is any broadband Internet access not provided by megacarriers.* Full credit.

- *The OSTP Memo will be rolled back.* Hm. This one has been difficult to gauge, with all the other noise drowning it out. Half credit?

- *Elsevier will lose either a national Big Deal (Germany is the obvious candidate, but who knows, Jisc might locate its spine) or a major consortial US Big Deal, on the order of an entire state university system.* Full credit; thank you, Germany.

- *More racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-trans campus violence.* Full credit. Unfortunately.

Perhapses

- *Another library school (and the Loon uses the word "library" instead of "information" with intent) will either be forcibly merged, fold, or cede accreditation.* Full credit due to a merger.

- *The aforementioned Elsevier-negotiation breakdown shatters the dike at last.* No credit *yet*, but the Loon still backs this one for the next three years or so. In seven to ten years, the Loon suspects the story will be who *hasn't* yet stared Elsevier down, rather than who has.

- *Rollback or no rollback, some federal agencies will continue down their OSTP Memo path.* Full credit.

- *Sci-Hub use explodes in Europe and the US.* Full credit based on related discourse only, but the Loon doesn't have Sci-Hub usage numbers. Does anyone know whether anyone does?

Who knows? Not this Loon.

- *For-profit higher education, including coding bootcamps.* Smart money is now on "bubble" after several coding-bootcamp closures. The next bubble appears to be either learning analytics or its partner in crime "personalized learning."

- *Surveillance in higher education and libraries, call it "assessment" or "learning analytics" or what you will.* See above. The opposition is definitely mobilizing, but what seems more likely to kill this evil privacy-invading nonsense is lack of efficacy.

- *Twitter.* Still limping along. The Loon pondered a move to Mastodon, and may yet follow through; the hitch for her is (given her incorporeal pseudonymity compared to her Boring Alter Ego's too, too solid flesh) some kind of Mastodon client that can handle multiple accounts.

Past years' predictions

The Loon is looking only for predictions she gave herself no or half credit for, but that now deserve more.

- 2013: *Pro-toll-access arguments will be nibbled to death by carve-outs* and 2015: *One or more of the big pigs will pull another fauxpen-access ploy, possibly under the CHORUS banner.* Temporary OA (which has been assigned yet another color, but the Loon forgets what—bronze, or something) has become a standard toll-access response to news coverage.

- 2013: *More LIS school mergers.* Half credit.

- 2014: *Continued clashes between toll-access publishers and faculty-as-authors.* This absolutely deserves full credit now. Not all clashes have exactly been constructive, but there certainly have been clashes!

- 2014: *Federal agencies will announce their OSTP Memo responses, sparking an immense wave of confusion, backlash, and flailing.* Half credit. The Loon forgot "handwaving," sadly.

- 2015: *A library will be caught leaking digital patron data* and 2016: *A library will be caught in a serious patron-data leak.* At least two substantial library-patron-data breaches announced this year (one in California, one in Wisconsin). Full credit.

On the whole, not a bad prediction year… or half-decade.

Anticipating 2018

The last (for now) in this series, dated December 20, 2017.

The no-brainers are mostly a discouraging lot: ISPs, freed from net neutrality, began "shenanigans"; more peer-review scandals; more sexual-harassment scandals in higher ed; Germany doesn't cave to Elsevier.

For the others? Go read the post: they're interesting and mostly above my pay grade (although I'm hopeful that the blockchain bubble will start to collapse this year).

Now, back to dry land…

The near and far future of libraries

An interesting title for this Whitney Kimball piece—undated but I tagged it on March 17, 2015—under a "Technology" flag at *Hopes&Fears*. The tease:

As archives become digital and machines become smarter, what function will libraries serve ten years and ten thousand years from now? Hopes&Fears asks the experts.

The supposed experts on library futures? An AI academic; a public library director (who talks about two "humanoid robots"); a former Internet Archive engineer; a Long Now director.

What do these folks have to say about library futures? Basically nothing. Here are the closest they come:

The AI professor, after telling us that current AI is probably already as good as any human being for reader's advisory and dating advice:

> **The good news is libraries are morphing**, are surviving, by becoming places of community, where kids go, come to read books, draw together…there are workshops being held… it's more than just a source of information. People need physical places to read, find like-minded people from the neighborhood. Libraries hold things like writing contests. Those roles have not gone away, librarians are changing what they do, for example they're teaching people how to use technology. The need for a physical place to meet, surrounded by books and information– I guess libraries have always played that role.

I find it especially interesting that this UMichigan academic interprets "libraries" as "public libraries." But given his assertion that Amazon's version of reader's advisory is "probably…as good as any human being would be," I don't know how seriously to take it.

Then there's the executive director of the Westport Library with her nonfunctional humanoid robots and talk of disruptive technology, whose *only* comment on library futures is that the robots' "presence is a signal that the public library is on the cutting edge of learning."

After reading this nothingburger piece, I went to the home page. Nothing appears to carry a date; no About; apparently somehow connected to New York City (maybe?)…mysterious. And maybe pointless?

5 Things That Will Disappear In 5 Years

It's time for the silly season, as for example this January 3, 2016 piece by Tom Gonser at *TechCrunch*. It's a solid chunk of triumphalist "higher tech is *always* better and sweeps all else away" writing, as you'd expect from the source—and, of course, "disappear" because we all replace everything that counts at least every half-decade (for a certain value of "we all").

The five—and, remember, these will be gone *for everybody*, not just TechKiddies, by 2021:

1. Checks, credit cards, and a little while later cash itself.
2. USB sticks (and physical media in general).
3. Passwords, because biometrics on The Smartphones That Everybody Already Carries and Depends Upon for Life Itself. (Oh, sorry, that was an editorial comment.)
4. Remote controls. (What replaces them? See above.)
5. Static documents and paper agreements. That's right: the million-dollar house you buy will have its deed and all contracts *only in the cloud.*

Security? Disruption of the Internet of Things? What sort of Luddite are you, anyway? That some sensible folk may still be watching the same TV in 2021 that they purchased in 2016? Nonsense!

"Disappear" is a tricky term. With the possible exception of smallpox, it's pretty much guaranteed to be wrong. Which has never stopped *TechCrunch* and others of its ilk.

Deprecated: The Ars 2017 tech company Deathwatch

I've poked fun at *ars technica*'s "deathwatch" articles in the past; by December 30, 2016, when this piece by Sean Gallagher, Ron Amadeo and Sam Machkovech appeared, the whole concept was so laden down with caveats that it now seems to mean something few would equate with death.

> "Deathwatch" is not a prediction of actual corporate demise—that sort of thing, as we've seen with past Deathwatch selectees, rarely happens quickly or completely. Most failing companies—and even many failed products—limp on in some way through acquisition, integration, inertia, or the eternal zombie life of bankruptcy protection. Instead, Deathwatch is a way of recognizing those entities in a different sort of mortal peril: technical, economic, and/or cultural irrelevance.

So given that this is really "troublewatch" at best, how did they do *for* 2016 and what did they predict for 2017?

The six picks for 2016 were Yahoo, HTC, the BlackBerry OS, Groupon, Rdio and Tidal. At the end of 2016 they *still* say Tidal's dying, but just hadn't died yet. Rdio is gone; BlackBerry OS is gone. The others? Well,,,

Candidates for death or irrelevance in 2017: Yahoo!, Yik Yak, Twitter, Theranos, HTC, Gearbox Software, and the rest of BlackBerry—and they add a special "back from the dead" for RadioShack.

Let's quote some of the masterful analysis of why Twitter nearly disappeared in 2017:

> Twitter isn't going to vaporize by the end of 2017. But rest assured, Twitter as we know it will not last through the year. And we're not talking about some sort of visual overhaul or slight feature tweak like the ones we've come to expect from major rivals like Facebook every year or so.

> Twitter's continual bleeding of cash will have to come to an end, one way or another….

> Critics have railed against the platform for its inability to handle harassment and abuse. Twitter CEO Jack Dorsey has made a lot of public statements about this issue dating back over a year, but real change simply hasn't come to the platform…

> Young users are flocking to Snapchat in droves, which has aggressively bolstered its base experience with more insulated friend-list tools and a clever, video-driven news feed service. Ten seconds of video is the

new 140 characters of text—yes, that's 10 seconds, not 6. Twitter was built for an SMS world, and between the [closure of Twitter-owned Vine](#) and the inability of Twitter-owned Periscope to combat Snapchat's growth, the company doesn't seem poised to leave SMS behind in a successful way. Meanwhile, Twitter's acquisitions and NFL-related deals have bled more cash than they've earned.

It's likely that Twitter will be forced to sell itself at a huge discount (or sell off bits of its intellectual property) just to keep the site afloat through the end of 2017—or until its user base is folded into something else, though what that would be is much harder to predict. Also, expect Twitter to do something drastic as a last gasp to raise its public profile before such a sale closes. (If there's a way to place a Vegas wager on Twitter deleting the @realDonaldTrump account at some point, put me down for $10.)

I'm convinced. Except that somehow, warts and all, Twitter is still around (and apparently profitable), and has at least done a better job of purging fake accounts than FaceBook. Oh, and Twitter doubled the basic length and made threads *really* easy to build.

As for the resurrection of RadioShack:

We'd like to conclude our dive into the depths of technology business despair on a hopeful note, recognizing a Deathwatch graduate that passed into the great beyond of bankruptcy and then emerged, phoenix-like, from its ashes.

RadioShack—#TheShackisBack. This is not the Radio Shack of yesteryear. The new RadioShack is a retail startup backed by the hedge fund Standard General, leveraging the last of the stores of the bankrupt original (now known as RS Legacy Corp.) and a deal with Sprint to provide a store-in-a-store for the mobile carrier.

The new Shack hopes to latch on to the rising "maker" movement and STEM education efforts; we encountered the brand's relaunch this summer when we did some soldering at the National Maker Faire elbow-to-elbow with musician/reality TV star/headphone hawker Nick Cannon. Considering the beating that local electronics stores have taken in the Amazon/Big Box age, we'd love to see the new RadioShack succeed—and give us someplace local where we can pick up an Arduino shield at 6pm on a Friday.

Sounds great. Except that the new owners took RadioShack through a *second* bankruptcy in March 2017 and essentially closed all remaining stores by the end of the year, selling the name and intellectual property for $15 million. There's still a website; if I look for RadioShack stores within 100 miles of where I live (which includes all of Silicon Valley and the Bay Area, and a big chunk of the Central Valley), it shows me three stores, in Modesto, Hollister and Greenfield, none of which are actually RadioShack stores. That's some resurrection!

License expired: The Ars Technica 2018 Deathwatch
And here's the next installment, by Sean Gallagher on December 28, 2017.

> Some of the companies previously on our Deathwatch radar didn't survive long enough to even make our final 2018 list. Pour out one for Radio Shack, which died even faster the second time around after what looked like a brave reboot. Others have been circling the drain for some time and are by this time old friends of the 'Watch, comforting in their continual plummet despite all other forces of nature. And some… well, some just halted and caught fire this year in a way that promises to provide years of Schadenfreude to come.

Looking back at the 2017 predictions, they say Yahoo! is effectively deceased because it's been purchased by Verizon; Yik Yak really is gone; Theranos is on life support; BlackBerry is now a software and services company; and they *still* think HTC and Twitter are doomed.

The 2018 doomed list—noting, even with all the disclaimers, that these are companies likely to be dead *or irrelevant* by the end of 2017: Uber; Twitter; Faraday Future; LeEco; net neutrality; HTC; and SoundCloud. I don't know anything about some of these but, honestly, for better or worse, I think it unlikely that either Uber or Twitter will be irrelevant by the end of 2018.

Tech Trends That Need to Die in 2018

Rob Marvin on December 19, 2017 at *PC Magazine*. It's a recurring feature—not predictions that a fad or buzzword or trend *will* die, but that it *should*. A key paragraph from the intro:

> This year, the Internet of Things is still terribly insecure and full of useless "smart" devices. Online harassment is rife and worse than ever, with trolls gaining ground in the perpetual war for the internet. Oh, and plenty of our staffers still stand ready and willing to die on the "smartphones should have headphone jacks" hill. Sorry, Apple (we're not sorry).

The 2017 list included online harassment, fake news, the insecure Internet of Things, removing useful features from devices, shady internet access schemes, insecure websites, default location tracking, "distracted AR gaming," forced Windows upgrades, and Netflix and Amazon "reboot duds" (although one example, Gilmore Girls, wasn't a reboot at all: it was a limited extension with the original cast). As you can guess, most of those are still around (and, hey, why is a crappy broadcast network reboot of a sitcom with a racist star OK, but a Netflix reboot isn't?).

This year's list? Unnecessary smart devices (I like the phrase Internet of Shit); passwords (here we go again: biometrics because EVERYBODY has smartphones on ALL THE TIME); "everything is a social network" (I'm not sure what they're getting at here except for a recap of reducing abuse); online harassment; "AI and Machine Learning Everything" (well,

yes); blockchain as a buzzword (double yes); "sharing without verifying" (how fake news goes viral); "clueless startups" (Juicero, anyone?); phones without headphone jacks (again); endless robocalls (yes, but tools like Nomorobo help a *lot*); 360-degree cameras (in most cases); "the end of the third-party doctrine" (you need to read that in the original); "zero-sum security"; video game loot crates; and "pivoting to video" (slow clap).

A good list. I'm guessing at least two-thirds of these will still be annoyances at the end of 2018.

Predictions

Let's close by looping back to libraries—this time, not a set of predictions but Barbara Fister's January 3, 2018 "Library Babel Fish" *discussion* of some earlier predictions or desires for library futures.

As usual, since Fister writes better than I do (and, I'd guess, thinks better than I do), I suggest reading the reasonably brief original rather than my inadequate summaries. Her two prime examples are one of Steve Coffman's "let's turn public libraries into businesses" rants, this one in *American Libraries* in 1998, and a 2010 conference presentation by Eli Neiburger that was largely anti-printed-book.

Fister remembers Coffman's stupidity as having more influence than I remember; I believe very few public libraries still call their patrons "customers," for example. I'd almost forgotten Neiburger's brief moments of glory when he said libraries were screwed (seems like he's mostly known for an 11-year-old book about gaming in libraries). But hey, I'm old, and maybe I forget…

> It's not that we librarians don't deal with profound change – we do. Every day. But it's not as sudden and dramatic as our "thought leaders" would have us believe. A lot of libraries have coffee shops now, and they pay attention to how space is used to make improvements. A lot of our collection has moved online, and we are making local things like archival collections and digital projects available beyond our institutions. We're supporting academic publishing in new ways, but not abandoning our role in making published things available to our local community. We aren't screwed, but if we believed in the gospel of disruption and totally abandoned what we do to chase the new, we would have been.

What Ms. Fister sez.

Privileged Travel

National Geographic keeps sending us travel catalogs (probably because my wife subscribes to *National Geographic Traveler)* and I seem to remember grumping about earlier round-the-world-by-private-jet offerings and the carbon footprint involved. I felt, and still feel, that an operation like National Geographic should show at least *some* respect for ecological issues, and that taking 75 "guests" on a Boeing 757 (which would normally seat 239) to a handful of cities all around the world seemed awkward.

Not that I no longer feel that way—I do—but National Geographic doubled down in the Expeditions catalog we received a while back. Now there's a whole "Private Jet Trips" section. It leads off with four more iterations of the 24-day, eleven-city around-the-world extravaganza for the low, low price of $165.900 per couple in 2018 and $173.890 per couple in 2019. Hey: you get to visit *eleven cities*, and drinks and food are included! (If you're alone, it's $91,900 in 2018 and $95,540 in 2019.)

Now you have other choices! One that's not quite so awful for carbon footprint is a 21-day round-trip from London to Petra/Wadi Rum, Baku, Kathmandu, Seychelles, Masai Mara, Johannesburg, the Okavango Delta and Fez for a mere $195,890 per couple (but that doesn't include air fare to and from London).

But the topper is, to my mind, the perfect example of Privileged Travel in terms of ecology, cost, and connection between the nature of the trip and its focus: "happiness and longevity." That's right: all you meditative sorts seeking inner peace and tranquility can take an 18-day jaunt from Seattle to Copenhagen, stopping at Tokyo/Okinawa, Luang Prabang, Paro/Thimphu (Bhutan), Crete/Ikaria, and Sardinia, various "longevity hotspots," to learn the secrets of a long and happy life, including meditation and moments of calm. The fare? A mere $199,890 per couple. Plus airfare to Seattle at one end and from Copenhagen at the other. Only 52 "guests" on this soulful journey.

Second Thoughts on Travel-Price Grumping
So who am I to grump about how people spend their money? There's clearly an audience for these oh-so-socially-responsible adventures: otherwise, NatGeo wouldn't have four upcoming round-the-world trips. And my wife and I have seen much of the world by cruise ship (not for the past decade, for various reasons, but we hope to do some traveling again). Several of those cruises were on high-end lines—Crystal, what's now Regent Seven Seas, Windstar. (I don't think we'd be willing to pay Regent Seven Seas' current rates, and maybe not Crystal's, but they didn't used to

be quite as "all-inclusive" and priced accordingly.) What's just luxurious and what's silly enough to make fun of?

OK, in the case of the "happiness and longevity" tour, I believe it just *begs* to be made fun of. Otherwise, apart from the incongruity of NatGeo pushing massive-carbon-footprint vacations, it may be an issue of who the target audience is. In other words: for what couples is a $199,890 18-day vacation an even remotely plausible travel option?

My rule of thumb *for us* might have been that a vacation shouldn't cost more than 20% of our *disposable* income for a year—after all mortgage, retirement, tax, food, health insurance and other bills are spoken for. My guess is that we kept it closer to 10% for one vacation or 20% for a year, but I may be wrong. At this later stage in life, I'd look at percentage of net worth. So: what percentage of your net worth is reasonable to spend on one vacation? One percent? Five percent?

If it's one percent, then the target market for these jet jaunts is people worth around $20 million. If it's five percent (really? twenty two-week vacations to exhaust your net worth?) then it's a mere $4 million.

There is no single truth here, but I think it's reasonable to put things somewhere in the middle: that the target market is families worth at least $10 million. Which leaves us *way* the heck out of the target. On the other hand, it's a bigger market than I'd expect: apparently about a million households in the U.S.

So Natgeo's jaunts ~~may~~ do seem extravagant to me, but that's just because we're not wealthy. (At least using one definition of "wealthy" I've seen recently: "Never having to pay attention to a price tag.")

Now, on with more snark…

Quick Takes in Audio & Video

Catching up with a year's worth of noteworthy items from *Sound & Vision* and *Stereophile*.

3D TV: It's Inevitable!

At least that seemed to be the rallying cry among some video/tech journalists in 2011-2012. Your next TV would be 3D, *whether you wanted it or not*, because that's all that would be produced. That was certainly the feeling of a THX higher-up, and I'm pretty sure some *Sound & Vision* columnists were on the bandwagon.

And then the bandwagon's wheels fell off. Bringing us to Ken Pohlmann's June 2017 *Sound & Vision* column, "3D TV I Dead." It's actually not a bad column (if you assume that Pohlmann *really* pulled away from the crowd early on), pointing out some of the reasons 3D TV doesn't work very well at home. Note that most better 4K UHD TVs don't offer 3D at all (it's not even part of the 4K spec). One does wonder about the close:

> Speaking of realism, it is also ironic that 3D is leaving just as virtual reality is coming. If you thought people looked goofy wearing 3D glasses, just you wait.

I don't anticipate VR taking over any more than 3D TV did, but what do I know?

Thanks for the Memories

That's the title on this six-page feature in the June 2017 *Sound & Vision.* It's a heavily-illustrated, effusive description of a home theater installation—not unusual for *S&V*, and as usual this magazine (which normally features midrange equipment) wouldn't even hint at the total cost. In this case, that may be just as well: It's not just a home theater (12 seats, 19' x 12'); it's a whole damn Bronx street brought back to life in a 4,000-square-foot basement (12 foot ceilings), reached by elevator from the rest of this presumably-modest Charleston house.

It's…something. Heck, [you can read about it yourself](). I'm not even ridiculing the setup: it was clearly a passion project for this family (which did much of the work), and these are producers from a showbiz family. (I could wonder why this is a good use of *S&V*'s limited editorial space, but that's the magazine's business. Maybe they're offering it up to give other wealthy readers ideas…)

Breaking Into Class A

GoldenEar Technology makes loudspeakers that are generally regarded as offering exceptional value, from the Triton Five up to the more expensive Triton Two and the $5,000/pair Triton One. The Triton One was generally very well reviewed, and as of October 2017 *Stereophile*'s Recommended Components roundup had it as *borderline* Class A—but that means it was in Class B. Of course, since the cheapest full-range Class A speakers were $15,000 and most were *much* more expensive, that may only be reasonable.)

So GoldenEar introduced the Triton Reference, $8,500 a pair. It got a rave review in the June 2017 *Sound & Vision.* It got a pretty much rave review in the January 2018 *Stereophile* (the cover line calls it an "affordable super loudspeaker"), although the reviewer did mention some slightly-better loudspeakers (costing anywhere from $38,000 to $102.000). And, yes, it is now in *Stereophile*'s Class A (full-range) pantheon, by far the ~~cheapest~~ least expensive speaker there.

How Quickly Things Pass

Finishing up the June 2017 *Sound & Vision,* I'll just note one passage in a review of Yamaha's MusicCast amp and wireless speaker, which has its own amp: "There is no analog input to patch in museum-piece iPods or other non-wireless devices…"

June 2017, and for Mark Fleischmann iPods are museum pieces.

Trickle-down Sound

OK, so trickle-down economics is bull, better called "siphon-up economics." But Dan Gibson's letter in the June 2017 *Stereophile* does make a good point, one with I tend to agree. He's discussing the "price event horizon," the point at which *for a given person* spending more on a given thing (car, speaker, TV, restaurant meal, wine, amplifier, whatever) becomes ludicrous. As he notes, for most things there's a sweet spot, where you get most of the quality for a relatively modest price—but there are people able and willing to spend *much* more for a tiny improvement. (He notes that a friend of his, a custom audio installer, loves to mention a customer who spent $1 million on his *bedroom* sound system).

Gibson likes to read reviews of cars and sound equipment he'd never be willing (or able?) to pay for; generally, so do I. And as he notes:

> The beauty is that many of the features of high-ticket items will trickle down to the less-expensive products in a company's line. In fact, building überexpensive products is a very effective marketing strategy for selling models further down in a company's product portfolio.

"What Good…

was the money doing in the bank instead of in my audio system, where I can enjoy listening to it?" Thus Michael Fremer justified buying the $48,000 phono preamplifier he'd said he couldn't afford when he reviewed it. (So he says in a June 2017 *Stereophile* followup.)

Always a nice choice to be able to make—and, after all, Fremer only already had a $23,250 preamp and a $26,000 preamp and… You can *never* have too many high-end phono preamps, I guess.

Crappy measurements? Lemme explain…

It's one thing for a couple of *Stereophile* writers who pretty clearly prefer euphonic distortion to speak highly of badly-measuring equipment. What I see two (or three) times in the July/August 2017 *Stereo Review*, however, is something else: the editor following really bad "test bench" showings with his explanation of why the equipment is still wonderful and deserving of S&V's silly "Top Pick" badge.

On page 55, an outdoor speaker has an *enormous* peak in the upper treble, up something like 10dB at 15kHz. Basically, that gets explained away because it's on-axis and most outdoor listeners will be *way* off-axis. On page 63, a fairly expensive speaker ($1,795/pair) needs to have the fact that response at 80Hz is down 3dB explained away. The explanation? Well, you see, that's relative to a "somewhat elevated midrange bump." In both cases, the product gets that award—and in both cases, we're essentially being told to ignore what few measurements *S&V* bothers to do. The third one? Page 65, also a Top Pick, but at least they're relatively cheap ($399/pair) powered loudspeakers. The text notes that the manufacturer

claims bass response down 2dB at 65Hz—but the response measures as down 3dB at 92Hz and 6dB at 72Hz. Probably pretty good speakers for the price (and they don't need an amplifier), but… no editor's note.

Brinkmann Audio Nyquist D/A Processor

This Michael Fremer review (August 2017 *Stereophile*) of an $18,000 digital/analog converter (with a headphone amp—and with tubes) is interesting for two reasons—in addition to the oddity of the "LPs are Always Better" Fremer drooling over a digital device (laden with his usual "if you don't hear what I hear, you're not listening" stuff). First: after Fremer touts the importance of high-resolution digital, he more-or-less writes off his expectation that measurements will show that tube noise prevents the Brinkmann from fully resolving such files, with a "but it makes pretty music" bit. (Let's set aside that he also suggests spending another $7,500 to upgrade the *power cord* for this $18,000 device.) Second, John Atkinson's measurements are in fact problematic. His close (and the last sentence clearly references Fremer's "but the measurements don't matter" line):

> Overall, I was disappointed by the Brinkmann Nyquist's measured performance. The higher-than-usual levels of random noise, the increase in distortion at low frequencies, and the supply-related sidebands all bothered me. You shouldn't have to make excuses for a DAC costing $18,000.

One additional thing we learn in the review about Fremer's incredibly expensive sound system: "I have thousands of SACDs but no SACD player that works." OK. After all, a really good SACD (and DVD, Blu-ray, UHD Blu-ray, CD, and DVD Audio) player would cost $600 to $1,200…

CDs are unlistenable

The next month—September 2017 *Stereophile*—Fremer lays it out a little more clearly: he says "for lovers of LPs and haters of CDs such as I" and flatly calls CDs "unlistenable." So there. Worth remembering when Fremer reviews any equipment that plays CDs (as he frequently has for *Sound & Vision*). (I could note that Fremer burns CD-Rs to show differences between high-end phono cartridges or turntables, but I'm sure there's an explanation other than "since they're from LPs, they have that euphonic distortion that makes them listenable.")

Ode to MP3

And, just to make it more interesting, here's Ken Pohlmann in the October 2017 *Sound & Vision* noting that the patents for MP3 have expired and discussing the importance of MP3. Here's the paragraph I find troubling:

> It is unfortunate that [MP3] was often maligned. Sure, at low bitrates, its artifacts are severe. But it is wrong to use that shortcoming to entirely condemn psychoacoustic coding.. **At higher bitrates**, **while**

> **still significantly reducing the signal's input bitrate, MP3 can be transparent, thus validating its approach**…[Emphasis added.]

I'd love to believe that, and for quite a few years I thought I did—after all, I'd ripped our CD collection at *the highest possible* MP3 bitrate (320k), and was using "CDs" of artists' best songs re-expanded from the MP3 files.

But…my wife started noting that she really didn't enjoy listening to solo piano music, unless I put the original CD on. For that matter, we were both noticing that we didn't want to listen for more than 30-45 minutes or so. And I pretty much gave up on orchestral music via MP3.

As I've recounted elsewhere, I acquired an inexpensive high-rez digital music player, added an SDHC card, and reripped all of our CDs to lossless FLAC, which doesn't save much space but is lossless. And started using the $220 device for weekend dinner music instead of MP3-based CDs—or burned new CD-Rs from the FLAC files.

My wife said everything sounded better. I noticed that the music wasn't tiring and seemed cleaner. The CDs-from-FLAC just plain *sounded better* than the CDs-from-MP3—and this is on either an old $600 stereo system or my $80 headphones.

I believe that high-bitrate MP3 can be "transparent" for blind testing, especially using music that doesn't demand much, but I no longer believe that it *is* transparent. If my aging ears hear the difference (now admittedly aided by hearing aids), and my wife can clearly tell whether she's getting MP3-based or FLAC-based, well, I suspect there is a difference.

"We don't review prototypes"

That's what Art Dudley says (as *Stereophile* policy) in the October 2017 issue, and he states the entirely reasonable basis for that policy. That discussion is then, of course, followed by a brief and highly favorable review of a pair of $97,000 loudspeakers. Which are prototypes. The review is by another reviewer—and it's followed by Dudley's own favorable discussion-that-sure-looks-like-a-review of these pricey prototypes. I won't name the maker: they played *Stereophile* nicely, but not me. [The next column is also a charmer, as one of *Stereophile*'s increasingly eccentric columnists calls stereo a "marketing gimmick" and that mono is more natural." I can't even…]

Honest specs from an old-line company.

November 2017 *Sound & Vision*, p. 66, Test Bench portion of a review of a $480 Pioneer multichannel receiver. The manufacturer's power rating is 80 watts per channel—with the usual caveat "two channels driven at 8 ohms." Usually, this means that the power output with *all* channels driven will be much lower. But here are the results for this modestly-priced system at 1% THD: 122 watts per channel with two channels driven; 81.9 watts per channel with five channels driven; 75.5 watts per channel with

all seven channels driven. That last number is surprisingly close to 80Wpc (and, of course, the caveat is in play). I was struck by this just because it's so unusual for receivers, even considerably more expensive. (Also true: *in most cases*, surround channels don't get driven to the extent that front channels do, so lower output capacity may not matter. Most is not all, and it is refreshing to see an old-line company overdeliver.)

Whaddya expect for $93,000? Decent measurements?
I'm reasonably used to cases where a *Stereophile* reviewer—especially one of several with Firm Notions as to what things should sound like and a certain dismissiveness toward accurate reproduction—comes to conclusions sharply different than those in John Atkinson's detailed measurements. I've noted elsewhere that Atkinson's developed a vocabulary for dealing with tube amplifiers loaded with distortion and loved by reviewers in spite of (or because of) that distortion.

The long review of the Ypsilon Electronics Hyperion monoblock power amplifier in the April 2018 *Stereophile* seems a bit different, partly because this is a hyperexpensive component: $93,000 a pair. It's a hybrid, with tubes on the input side and transistors for output. And it measures badly, enough so that Atkinson concludes "It is not an amplifier that I would recommend, especially given its price. While I have found that power amplifiers tend to sound different from one another, I feel they should be engineered to be as close to neutrally balanced as possible, and not designed for a 'tailored' sound, as the Hyperion seems to be,"

Michael Fremer *loved* it and had an excuse for the high distortion: "Keep in mind that the tube microphones used in the making of many of your favorite recordings probably measured similarly." Because one end of the chain is distorted, the other end might as well be too? Ummm…

The manufacturer wrote a spirited defense that essentially says the amplifier is great *for the measurements the manufacturer cares about, and other measurements don't matter*.

End of story, right? Except that the April issue is also *Stereophile*'s biannual "recommended components" issue—and there, *in Class A*, is the Ypsilon Hyperion, even though when I've seen other cases where reviewers disagree, the component usually winds up in the lower category. Of course, when the choice is "best possible sound regardless of cost" (and while there *are* other Class A Solid-State units priced even higher, there are also ones priced as low as $3,499) or "not recommended"—well, I have to wonder how Class A wins the day.

And that's it: caught up with audio magazine oddities for now.

We All Live in Lake Woebegone

At least that's one reasonable conclusion from "[Why you think you're better than everyone else](#)," by Esther Inglis-Arkell on December 9, 2013 at *io9*.

> People, as we know, have mixed abilities. One person might be more skilled than average when it comes physical ability, but lack judgment. Others excel when it comes to the ability to buckle down and work hard, but aren't the most inspired. But not you. You're very good at everything… at least that's what we all tell ourselves, thanks to the illusion of superiority.

OK, so "all" in the headline and the last sentence is, as almost always, a false generalization. Still… the author goes on to note one study that found that 93% of people consider themselves above average drivers; 94% of college professors think they're above average professors; nearly one-third of the workers at one software company thought they were in the top 5% of employees.

She offers some reasons for these impossible *but not implausible* results. There's the extrinsic incentives bias:

> We believe that all the good things that drive us are intrinsic to our character. Other people? Not so much. We work hard because we are dedicated, while they just want higher pay. We go back to school because we love to learn. Other people probably sat next to a motivational poster on a bus. We join the Peace Corps because we want to make a difference. Other people want to take a break before they have to start working. Our excellence in all our pursuits springs from the fact that we have a finer soul. Other people just happened to come to the same conclusion because they were pushed by circumstance. No wonder we're better than average.

Then there's the payoff of this relatively short piece: sure, you see how silly this is. Sure, you recognize the numbers. But how likely is it that you'll believe *you* are a mediocre driver, or no better at your job than most other people, or…

I love the first and apparently only comment, from a Dr Emilio Lizardo: "I hope the rest of you read this and took it to heart."

Touché.

On Being the Best, or Not

John Scalzi was inspired by the above to post on December 20, 2013 at *Whatever*.

> While reading it, I had two thoughts:

> **One**, it was a nice day when I learned I didn't have to be better than everyone else, just good enough;

> **Two**, I can think of several things where I am totally worse than many other people.

For the first part, he explains why he tries to keep becoming a better writer, but doesn't claim to be the Best Writer in the Room or even better than other writers in general.

> I am happy to say I am at least Competent Enough To Sell, which for a writer gets you through the gate.

There's more here, to be sure. Regarding the second, he admits to sucking at a variety of things such as drawing, cooking, knitting, "dressing myself," organization… I'll just quote the "knitting" one:

> **3. Knitting.** Seriously, how the hell do people even *do* that shit. I tried it once and it just turned me into a ball of anger and insecurity. I see knitters clacking away and making cool things and think *what sort of witchcraft is this?* It literally astounds me.

In closing, he agrees that Ms. Ingliss-Arkell is probably right:

> [L]eft to my own devices, I would happily think of myself as just plain being better at, oh, *everything*, because that's how I'm wired, along with, apparently, a lot of other people. It's not true, and, happily, it also doesn't matter if I am. Good enough works just fine.

More than four dozen comments, and as usual *Whatever* is an exception to the usual rule: they're generally worth reading.

Me? Well, Berkeley did give me that sheet of paper defaced with Ronald Reagan's signature, so I apparently wasn't a *terrible* student, but my "success" in grad school suggests I wasn't all that great. I'm just organized enough to keep our household accounts in order (but if my spouse wanted to take over, I wouldn't argue). I'm somewhere between a poor cook and a non-cook, mostly the latter these days. I'm probably a mediocre driver (but fairly cautious). Decent music sightreader, but once I realized that I type piano rather than making music (by listening to my spouse play, then listening to myself), I stopped. My writing has always been good enough to get published, but I lack the skills for fiction writing or bestsellerdom. And so it goes.

We need to talk about TED

So says Benjamin Bratton in the December 30, 2013 *Guardian*—and it's a, well, TEDx talk that's worth reading. Full disclosure: I've never given a TEDx talk nor been to a TED or TEDx session—and I don't think I've listened to more than a couple all the way through. But from what I have heard and read, I believe Bratton makes valid points "about the intellectual viability of things like TED…what it is and why it doesn't work."

> The first reason is over-simplification.

To be clear, I think that having smart people who do very smart things explain what they doing in a way that everyone can understand is a good thing. But TED goes way beyond that.

His example isn't directly from TED; read it yourself. Basically, a donor listened to a proposal from an astrophysicist and turned it down "because I just don't feel inspired…you should be more like Malcolm Gladwell."

Think about it: an actual scientist who produces actual knowledge should be more like a journalist who recycles fake insights! This is beyond popularisation. This is taking something with value and substance and coring it out so that it can be swallowed without chewing. This is not the solution to our most frightening problems – rather this is one of our most frightening problems.

So I ask the question: does TED epitomize a situation where if a scientist's work (or an artist's or philosopher's or activist's or whoever) is told that their work is not worthy of support, because the public doesn't feel good listening to them?

Some additional excerpts:

TED of course stands for *Technology, Entertainment, Design*, and I'll talk a bit about all three. I Think TED actually stands for: *middlebrow megachurch infotainment*.

The key rhetorical device for TED talks is a combination of epiphany and personal testimony (an "epiphimony" if you like) through which the speaker shares a personal journey of insight and realisation, its triumphs and tribulations.

He thinks "Entertainment" should be switched out for "Economics," and you should read his reasoning. As for "Design," part of his comment:

Instead of our designers prototyping the same "change agent for good" projects over and over again, and then wondering why they don't get implemented at scale, perhaps we should resolve that design is not some magic answer. Design matters a lot, but for very different reasons. It's easy to get enthusiastic about design because, like talking about the future, it is more polite than referring to white elephants in the room…

Phones, drones and genomes, that's what we do here in San Diego and La Jolla. In addition to the other insanely great things these technologies do, they are the basis of NSA spying, flying robots killing people, and the wholesale privatisation of biological life itself. That's also what we do.

The potential for these technologies are both wonderful and horrifying *at the same time*, and to make them serve good futures, design as "innovation" just isn't a strong enough idea by itself. We need to talk more about design as "immunisation," actively preventing certain potential "innovations" that we do not want from happening.

He lacks the Single Great Takeaway you expect from any Inspiring Talk, because, well…

> If we really want transformation, we have to slog through the hard stuff (history, economics, philosophy, art, ambiguities, contradictions). Bracketing it off to the side to focus just on technology, or just on innovation, actually *prevents* transformation…

> At a societal level, the bottom line is if we invest in things that make us feel good but which don't work, and don't invest in things that don't make us feel good but which may solve problems, then our fate is that it will just get harder to feel good about not solving problems.

> In this case the placebo is worse than ineffective, it's harmful. It's diverts *your* interest, enthusiasm and outrage until it's absorbed into this black hole of affectation.

> Keep calm and carry on "innovating" … is that the real message of TED? To me that's not inspirational, it's cynical.

How Netflix Reverse Engineered Hollywood

Alexis C. Madrigal discussed this on January 2, 2014 at *The Atlantic*, and it's still an interesting discussion (even if, as one of the three million Netflix DVD subscribers, I take issue with his apparent assumption that Netflix is entirely streaming)..

The question is how Netflix comes up with fairly odd and very specific subgenres and, as a result, with such interesting recommendations for what you might want to see next and how "more like" lists get generated.

And, for that matter, just how many of these subgenres there are.

Madrigal, with help from friends, answered the last question (at least for late 2013) without help from Netflix—and after he presented them with some of his findings (he says that at the time there were 76,897 subgenres) they invited him to interview the person who designed the whole system.

It's an interesting read; the subgenres involve (or involved) people paid to watch movies and TV shows and rate various aspects of them. The results are, well, interesting.

How to Lie with Data Visualization

I've probably visited this theme before, but this Ravi Parikh piece, appearing April 14, 2014 at *Heap*, is fairly short and very clear. Parikh focuses on three common ways to mislead through charts. Perhaps the most common one (you'll see it almost every time you look at a daily stock-market graph, for example) is the truncated Y-axis: that is, the graph that doesn't start values at zero, thus exaggerating differences.

I admit to being sadly surprised when Excel did this for a default graph one time: the set of values was all clustered fairly close together, so it "helpfully" had the axis near the lowest number rather than at zero. I corrected it, to be sure—and in my big GOAJ projects, it's only happened once. The worst examples are graphs that don't label the Y axis at all, so you get the drama without a referent.

Yes, the piece provides real-world examples: a Faux News screenshot showing how the top tax rate would, apparently, *quadruple* if the Bush tax cuts expired—because the graph has 34% as a baseline and 42% as the top Y value. Another seems to show that a baseball pitcher's knuckleball speed has roughly doubled—or, if you look at the numbers, gone from 75.3MPH to 77.3MPH.

The second misleading method is the cumulative graph, which is perfectly appropriate in some cases but can be terribly misleading. The example given charts quarterly revenue changes based on *cumulative* revenue rather than current annual revenue; naturally, cumulative revenue always goes up (unless you're not getting any revenue at all).

The third category is ignoring conventions—and the example (again from FN) is really Bizarro World: a big pie chart with three segments— segments that add up to 193%! Although that's perhaps not *quite* as preposterous as a real-world example from *Business Insider*: a chart showing gun deaths in Florida and how they changed after the "~~Shoot Anybody You Don't Like~~"—er, "Stand Your Ground" law was enacted. Wow! Look how the line drops precipitously in the years right after enactment, and stays low even with some rise.

Except…the zero in this case is at the *top* of the Y axis: the graph has been inverted! That steep drop was actually a fairly steep rise.

> There's a simple takeaway from all this: be careful when designing visualizations, and be *extra* careful when interpreting graphs created by others. We've covered three common techniques, but it's just the surface of how people use data visualization to mislead.

I should note that *Business Insider* was not to blame for the awful gun-death chart: that came from Reuters. [As the story now stands](#), it also has a corrected chart provided by a reader—scroll down past the bad chart.

Always Be Branding: John Scalzi, Maureen Johnson, and Bill Barnes Give Social Media Advice at BEA

I'm basically just pointing to [this Leah Schnelbach report](#) at *Tor.com* on June 2, 2014 and saying "go read and enjoy it"—and maybe lament that 2014 was while the U.S. still had a reasonably functioning government. Oh, sorry, that's an opinion, and to quote Scalzi:

> There is no reason to stick your neck out for anything. I've been online for 20 years, and I don't think I've ever expressed an opinion, ever. Why be a troublemaker? Why be that guy?

Anyone who reads Scalzi's blog or follows him on Twitter will surely know that he never, ever expresses any opinion whatsoever.

The Ad People Noticed

This odd story by Charlie Tyson appeared on June 11, 2014 at *Inside Higher Education*. It's all about an ad for an adjunct lecturer in English.

> The posting, which advertised for a quarterly adjunct lecturer in English, recommended that candidates possess a few "basic qualifications." These included: "at least 25 books on topics ranging from the history of Silicon Valley to the biography of microprocessing to interviews with entrepreneurs"; "e-books on topics such as home life in the US, home life in the UK, and water conservation"; a background in electronic media "such as being an editor of *Forbes ASAP* or a weekly columnist for ABC.com"; and experience hosting "television and radio productions for PBS, cable television, and ABC."

Huh? Turns out one candidate had all those qualifications: the guy who'd been teaching the course—which he created—for three years, who the university just wanted to rehire. Of course, we're talking *big money* here: $6,000 per course!

Social media had fun with the ad. So, for instance, this:

> "The successful applicant will be able to draw the sword Excalibur from the stone, revealing that he/she is the King/Queen of the Britons."

The real question is why a specialized adjunct position had to be advertised at all, I suppose. Not sure what to say about the comments at *IHE*…

Masthead