Cites & Insights
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Bibs & Blather Perspective
On Charting New Courses

Interesting times, interesting times. Both in the fortune-cookie sense and in more positive ways.

Time for some personal commentary—about what's happened over the past year and before, the new courses I'm charting and how that affects *Cites & Insights* and *Walt at random*.

Not Quite Six Decades: A Non-Memoir

I believe in directions more than goals, but one silly goal I'd had was to be able to claim six decades in library automation. Not sixty years, but six decades—a goal that can be achieved in as few as 42 years.

Making that goal required staying in that field for another three years, until 2010. I planned to retire in late 2011, when I turn 66 years old and am eligible for full Social Security benefits. Since I started working as a two-thirds-time to full-time systems analyst, designer, programmer in 1968, that would make six decades: The 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s, 00s, and 10s.

As *National Lampoon* put it in *Deteriorata*, "Whether you can hear it or not, the Universe is laughing behind your back." It was a silly goal in the first place and one I didn't go out of my way to reach. Five decades—and 39 years—make a pretty good first career, particularly in a field changing as rapidly as library automation.

It was a good run. I won't say every year was an unalloyed delight, but most years were worthwhile. I wasn't part of the first generation of library automators, the *real* pioneers. I think I can reasonably claim to be part of the second generation. To some extent, I fell into it accidentally, but I found I was good at systems design and implementation—and that I loved libraries. Some years I managed a small group or a project; most years I didn't.

A few highlights from those five decades:

➢ **1968**: Designing and building the first automated circulation system at UC Berkeley's Doe Library, using unit record equipment (keypunches, collator, sorter) and a call number keypunching system that could properly interfile the five call number systems Doe used in those days. I had an edge: I'd been paging and reshelving books in those five systems for years. My two greatest triumphs were programming the IBM 188 Collator (using jumpers and a punch board) *before* the collator actually arrived and having the program work, and a few months later when our IBM rep brought in some regional hotshots to visit the installation and one of the experts informed me that an IBM 188 Collator wasn't capable of doing what we were doing.

Inside This Issue

➢ **Very early 1970s**: Writing various library-related programs—first in COBOL, then in IBM BAL (assembly language), finally in PL/I once PL/I Optimizer was available. (Why did that matter? IBM System/360 mainframes weren't all that powerful by contemporary standards. According to one comparison I've seen, a midrange Intel Core 2 dual-core CPU, the level you might find in a $600 desktop or $750 notebook, has *twenty thousand times* the raw computing power of an IBM System/370-158—and the System 360/65 we used was less powerful than that. Contemporary PCs and Macs probably "waste" more than 90% of their raw computing power on operating system, user interface, and inefficient program language overhead; that's one reason modern PCs are worth using. In 1972, and for that matter in 1982, you learned to conserve every computing cycle you could if you wanted to run large-

scale production systems. I do *not* miss that aspect of those days, or submitting boxes of punched cards for once-a-day compilations on a remote computer.)

➢ **Early 1970s**: Designing and programming the "Key System" used to produce the Serials Key Word Index—print (and later microfiche) keyword indexes for Berkeley's vast serials holdings. The first full-scale index appeared in 1973. Notably, that system used MARC format records as input—yes, MARC II was already around. The same software was used for a Stanford union list of serials in October 1975, for lists at UC's San Francisco and Santa Barbara campuses, and for a combined UC Union List of Serials on fiche in 1976.

➢ **1976**: My first formal publication—and my *only* publication under my legal name (Walter C. Crawford): "Building a serials key word index," *Journal of Library Automation* 9:1 (March 1976), pp. 34-47. Refereed and all.

➢ **Mid to late 1970s**: Designing and implementing a 24-hour timesharing data entry system used to check in serials at UC Berkeley—on a three-terminal system running on a Datapoint "minicomputer." The Datapoint was probably the first computer using the 8088 instruction set (not with an Intel CPU—supposedly, the 8088 wasn't fast enough). It came with a fairly sophisticated operating system and ARC, a token-ring network system that was eventually swamped by Ethernet. The Datapoint central unit had a mighty 10MB disk cartridge. Once a week, data had to be transferred from that disk to a tape so it could be sent to the mainframe. I mention this for a slightly peripheral reason: It's how I met my wife, without whom most of this—and particularly my professional career—would have been unlikely.

➢ **1980s**: I specified and then built (programmed and wrote the JCL for) the batch processing and product batch generation system that supported RLIN II, RLG's online technical processing system. Lots of other programming and analysis on projects too numerous to mention. Extensive investigation of the online catalog literature and developments in the 1980s.

➢ **1990s**: Most notably designing and helping implement Eureka—first a command-oriented system using standard 80-column by 24-line terminals over RLG's dedicated network, later a web system using typical web user interface standards over the internet. Lots of session log analysis and failure analysis, leading to my proudest moment during the command-oriented version: the "Do What I Mean" im-

provements, a series of changes that reduced apparent user error from some 7% of all commands to less than 0.5%. Lots more session log analysis of the web version, leading to nothing quite as dramatic but helping guide an ongoing series of improvements: There's nothing new about "perpetual beta" in the sense of software that's updated on a continuing basis.

➢ **2000s**: Lots of refinements and a variety of related projects, culminating in the winding down of RLG services. OpenURL, various new standards movement, Unicode support (RLG was a founding member of the Unicode Consortium)…and, in an odd turn of events, final years spent back where I began: Producing customer reports in an entirely new environment.

That's a skeletal set of highlights. I've forgotten a lot more than I've remembered. It's likely (almost certain) that all the systems I designed and all the code I wrote have gone by the wayside. That's what you expect in the automation game. It was a good run overall. It's over, and that's OK.

My five decades as a systems analyst, designer and programmer aren't what I'm generally known for. I'm much better known for a parallel course—professional activity in LITA and ALA and as a writer and speaker. That course (*much* better documented in my CV, since that's how CVs work) began as an offshoot of my day job, but it deserves its own sketch.

Writing, Speaking and ALA

Maybe it was natural. I worked on the high school newspaper in my senior year (and on a short-lived but professionally-done independent paper the year before that) as features editor and columnist. I edited and mostly wrote the house newspaper for the co-op I lived in during part of my college years. My BA is in Rhetoric. Heck, I even wrote a book-length manuscript (on press treatment of the Free Speech Movement) without the aid of word processing software. (Never published and the manuscript's long since disappeared, but while doing the research I did build a permanent dislike of traditional roll microfilm readers, particularly used for newspapers on microfilm.)

ALA involvement? You can probably blame Susan K. Martin for that and you can *certainly* credit her for getting me to publish within the profession. She was head of the UC Berkeley Library Systems Office (and my boss), but also editor of *JOLA* in 1976. She encouraged me to write that article.

As far as I'm concerned, that parallel career continues. Now nearly all of my income-earning activities relate directly to writing and editing. My CV is readily

available, but it's as dry a read as any other CV. A few notes on the arcs of my professional (non-day-job) career might be amusing:

➢ **1975-1979**: Joined ALA. Sat in on meetings of the Technical Standards for Library Automation Committee (TESLA) of ALA's Information Science and Automation Division (ISAD), predecessor of LITA. Appointed to TESLA in 1978. Elsewhere, I was involved with the local ASIS (now ASIS&T) chapter and served on the National Conference Steering Committee in 1976, when the conference was held hereabouts. For various reasons, I left ASIS soon thereafter and can claim no significant role in that association. Speeches? One, part of a two-person sketch within a TESLA program at ALA in 1979. Other articles? One—essentially a transcript of that speech.

➢ **1980-1984**: Chaired TESLA in 1980-81. Served as an RLG liaison to ALA's interdivisional Machine-Readable Bibliographic Information Committee (MARBI, the MARC people) throughout the period (and until 1987). Helped found and chaired the Programmer/Analysts Discussion Group (which never really worked in its original intent). Served on a LITA/Gaylord Award committee. Wrote a feature book review in *Library Hi Tech*, four formal articles for *ITAL* and *Library Trends*, five reports and informal columns—and in 1984, three "Common Sense Personal Computing" articles in *Library Hi Tech* that started a five-year run (before morphing into other titles). No speeches. Oh yes, one other little thing: Around 1982, after spending too much time on the phone explaining MARC to people (as Product Batch manager at RLG) and seeing one library school's somewhat erroneous MARC syllabus, I tried to convince the experts at LC to write a proper book about MARC. When they didn't, I did—and, after two years of adventure with two publishers and loads of revisions, my first *published* book appeared in 1984, *MARC for Library Use: Understanding the USMARC Formats*.

➢ **1985-1989**: Most significant for my new position (in 2007, that is): The first four of nine years as editor of the *LITA Newsletter*, transforming the publication in the process. Also the first of three years as founding editor of *Information Standards Quarterly* for NISO, the National Information Standards Organization. I also spent two years as a LITA member of MARBI, the first two years of a three-year term on the LITA Board of Directors, another year on the LITA/Gaylord Awards committee—and the first four of 15 years on the *Library Hi Tech*

editorial board. I shouldn't forget the first of 11 years on the editorial board for *Public-Access Computer Systems Review*, an early refereed electronic-only journal. I wrote more than 50 editorials, columns and articles (including the first year of "Trailing Edge" in *Library Hi Tech*, which continued for a decade). Ten speeches, all between 1987 and 1989. My most productive period for books: Six books in all. By the end of the 1980s, I believe I had an established reputation as a writer and editor in several areas of librarianship and technology.

➢ **1990-1994**: The peak of my ALA activity, including the remaining years of *LITA Newsletter* (and *ISQ*—but that wasn't ALA), serving as LITA VP/President/Past President and serving on an odd short-lived "Free MARC" committee. Also served on the *ONLINE* editorial board and began contributing articles and (later) columns there. More articles, columns and editorials (more than 70); more speeches (two dozen); fewer books (four).

➢ **1995-1999**: Very little ALA/LITA activity: LITA Nominations Committee (twice), LITA/*Library Hi Tech* Award committee, the first of six years as a LITA Top Technology Trends "trendspotter." On the other hand, this was my big "awards period": The LITA/*Library Hi Tech* Award, the ALCTS/Blackwell Scholarship Award (shared), the Gale Group *ONLINE* Excellence in Information Authorship Award. "Trailing Edge Notes" began in *Library Hi Tech News* in 1995, starting a "monthly" contribution that changed to "Crawford's Corner" later and continues to this day as *Cites & Insights*. I started reviewing title CD-ROMs on a regular basis for *CD-ROM Professional* (1995-1996) and *Database* (1997-2000, but the magazine's title changed to *EContent* in 1999) and took over "PC Monitor" in *ONLINE* in 1999 (continuing it through the end of 2006, when the editor and I agreed it had run its course). I think it was around this time that I started maintaining a spreadsheet with deadlines and daily expectations, figuring that if I missed one deadline, the whole complex would come tumbling down. I missed one deadline between 1979 and 2007, and that was with plenty of warning. In all, more than 125 articles and columns (counting each "Trailing Edge Notes" as a single publication, just as I count this *Cites & Insights* as one publication). Also the peak of my speaking activity (just under 50). Only two books, but they were *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness & Reality* and *Being Analog: Creating Tomorrow's Libraries*.

➤ **2000-2004**: Nothing except Trendspotters for LITA or ALA. A few years in Marquis' *Who's Who in America*. "CD-ROM Corner" ended in *EContent* and "disContent" began (started in 2001, still going strong). "Crawford's Corner" ended—and *Cites & Insights* began. Following a series of *American Libraries* articles that began in 1999, I had "The Crawford Files" as a column from 2002 through 2004. Along with a fair number of miscellaneous publications, that amounted to just over 180 articles and columns—almost certainly the peak of my published writing (in item count, maybe not word count). For a couple of years, I was doing three magazine columns (two monthly) in addition to *Cites & Insights* and assorted other stuff, plus a full-time job. I'm not sure how I managed, to be perfectly honest. Thirty-odd speeches. One book.

➤ **2005-2007**: Leveling off and shifting gears. No LITA activity except a guest appearance among the Trendspotters. "disContent" went to alternate issues in *EContent*. The publication count should total 90, which at 30 per year is almost back down to (roughly) 1995-1999 levels, albeit with generally longer publications. *Walt at random* started, but I count that as one line in my CV. One speech a year of late. Two self-published books.

Those are the arcs in my other career. ALA activity peaked in the early 1990s. Speaking peaked in the late 1990s, with a relatively brief burst of high activity. Book writing peaked in the late 1980s. Setting aside editorials, I started doing a *lot* of short-form published writing in the late 1990s and peaked in the first years of the new century, but it's only been a slight decline since then. I've been writing roughly a quarter million words per year (not including blogs) for several years now. Then there's editing, where I had a good run for almost a decade, gave it a rest, and now look forward to doing it again in an entirely different medium.

I *certainly* intend to reach five decades as a writer, since that only takes three more years. Six decades? We'll see: that's a long way off. As for speaking, that's not up to me.

Charting New Courses

This year *has* been interesting. On the home front, we've gone a while without a vacation and too long without a cruise, in both cases because of an elderly cat (now deceased) who required more care than a pet sitter could reasonably handle. Issues with our work lives didn't help a lot either.

If you've been reading *Walt at random*, you've seen some of what's been going on. Or maybe you haven't. As I go through this year's posts, there are only a few that deal with state of mind—and several dealing with what I might be doing after September 30, 2007. I covered that specific issue in the November 2007 BIBS & BLATHER, with the press release for my new part-time contract with PALINET.

Breaking free

I took two weeks between positions. Maybe the break should have been longer, but it was long enough. It would have been awkward to take longer: PALINET's Annual Conference was October 29-30, and if I hadn't started by October 15, I wouldn't have been in a position to discuss the future of the PALINET Leadership Network at that conference. Still, after booking flights for the conference and dealing with contracts at the start of the month, I ignored PALINET for two weeks.

Similarly, after signing final papers, I ignored RLG and OCLC after September 30—and by October 7, that career was pretty much gone from my mind. What I recounted above in "Not Quite Six Decades" is more than I thought I'd have to say, and that's just over 1,000 words covering 39 years. For that first week, I relaxed, did some pleasure reading, slept in a little later and worked on *Cites & Insights* and the academic library blog project. I went back to Mountain View Public Library—on a weekday!—and started checking out books again.

I decided I couldn't afford to become sedentary, easier to do when you're working at home. I started thinking about that *before* October 1, buying a cheap pedometer, seeing how much more walking I needed to do for the five-mile-a-day goal (or 10,000 steps) and setting out to do at least that much walking. The first couple days at home, I also used the pedometer to see how much *less* walking I was doing than at the office. Turns out it's not a big difference: Figure 4,000 steps instead of 5,000, or half a mile less. So, in addition to my daily 1.5 miles (average) on the treadmill (at a slope ranging from four to 6.5 degrees), I needed to average at least 1.5 miles walking every weekday.

The longer walks are working. I hope to keep it up indefinitely. Got a bill to pay? I hand-carry the envelope to the post office, three quarters of a mile from home. Need lunch? Most days, I'll buy a sandwich at Safeway, buy a sandwich at Subway, eat at China Café, or maybe eat at Milan—all in the same neighborhood mall as the post office. Or maybe I'll go further afield: I've done two mile walks (each way) some days because it was a nice day and felt right.

Will I manage that when it's rainy? I hope so, but that's hard to say. There aren't all that many rainy days

in Mountain View. Yes, I'm still doing the treadmill, sweating to the old movies. With luck, the combination will keep my weight down and my health up.

The added medium-length walks that *aren't* on the treadmill do something else worthwhile. Those walks are ideal for contemplation or "non-thinking," taking in the sights and sounds. I tend *not* to focus on the afternoon's writing or the next day's work. I tend to relax, to look inside, to…well, I don't want to get too Left Coast on you. Let's just say long walks did a lot to clear my head the first week of October and set the stage for serious focus after another week had gone by. It wasn't hard to break free from a five-decade career—not hard at all.

The road ahead

I started working on the PALINET Leadership Network on October 15. By the end of that first week, I had a detailed timeline running through to the formal introduction at ALA Midwinter 2008. By the end of the second, I had a set of possibilities and plans, I'd reviewed all the content on the beta site and noted what I want to change, I'd gotten reasonably familiar with the wiki software—and I had the chance to discuss plans with people at PALINET and half of the advisory group for the network.

The plans and schedule are fairly ambitious for half-time work. I'm starting to extend those plans out past Midwinter. It's challenging and exciting, drawing on what I've done professionally but also requiring new ideas and attitudes. I'm sure I'll be blogging about it, probably at *Walt at Random*, and I imagine some echoes will creep into *Cites & Insights*. I already think I know a few things:

➢ When it comes to leadership, there's a lot more I *don't* know than there is that I do know. When I look at the range of issues around library leadership, leadership in general and various kinds of leadership, I recognize that I *care* about a lot of areas where I don't know enough to comment intelligently. That's good. It means I can do a good job as managing editor and assure people I won't be interfering with their ideas. If I feel strongly about an essay on the PALINET Leadership Network, there's always the Talk page. My opinions don't belong on other writers' content pages. I was always able to make that distinction while doing the *LITA Newsletter* and *Information Standards Quarterly*—and back then there were no Talk pages.

➢ Right now, I find the new situation is using more than half my "thought time," and that's likely to be true for some time to come—probably at least until we have a steady flow of

new content and a number of successful ways to get people involved. I'll be working on balance continually, but it's going to take time to work out properly.

➢ At the same time, I *have* reduced my overall commitment to the field. I'm not willing to spend 60 to 65 hours a week on "this stuff" any more. I want time to read for pleasure, time to go on walks, time to take vacations (we're signed up for a two-week cruise in late spring—it's a start!), time for extra sleep. Time to take back some of the chores my wife mostly handled during the year she was a part-time contract worker and I was full time. Even time to think about where (on the Pacific Rim) we *want* to live for the next couple of decades, since work isn't keeping us in Mountain View and I can do PALINET stuff from anywhere with broadband service and a nearby airport.

➢ I've started a new *ONLINE* column. That six-times-a-year column will sometimes start with material from *Cites & Insights*, but it's still another commitment.

➢ There's a possible wildcard that could change things even more, but I'm not worrying about that until (unless) it happens.

All of which has implications for *Cites & Insights*.

Expectations for Cites & Insights

First, a few notes about what Volume 7 looks like as compared to original projections. I said "no fewer than 12 and no more than 15 issues." That's easy: 13 *real* issues is as close to 12 as I've ever been. (*Cites on a Plane* doesn't count, since it was truly ephemeral.) "Aim for issue lengths between 16 and 30 pages." If you don't count *Cites on a Plane 2: This Time It's for Keeps*, my aim was true—but "16" is a joke. Not including this issue, which should be 22 pages, I count one issue at 22 pages, two at 24, *six* at 26, one at 28, and one at 30.

My *guess* is that *Cites & Insights* will be very haphazard in January 2008 and a little haphazard for the first half of 2008. It may get less focus than it deserves for a month or three. That *definitely* means no special pre-Midwinter issue, ephemeral or otherwise: **Buy one of my books instead!** It *probably* means I'll stick with one issue per month for most (if not all) of the year, and consider the possibility of one two-month combined issue. It *may* mean slightly shorter issues but I'll stick with "16 to 30 pages [except for special issues]," anticipating a range of 20 to 26 pages.

My other guess is that most of you won't notice any difference. At least that's my hope. If I'm right, things will firm up in the second half of the year. My

goal is to have a better publication than in previous years. (That's always my goal.)

Shortly after writing this (the first essay I've written for the issue, in early November 2007), I plan to go through the folders of source material for *Cites & Insights*, recycling quite a bit of the material. I can't cover it all. I never could. There's no reason to try. I'll also think about the areas where I feel I *currently* add value, focusing more on those.

That sort of reevaluation makes sense periodically when you continue to acquire new interests. If I wanted to be the guru of Topic X, I'd focus entirely on Topic X, bending other topics to relate somehow to X—but I've never been the guru of any topic.

This isn't new. Consider:

➢ *MARC for Library Use* was an important book and I spent years working on the MARC formats—but I don't write about MARC anymore and don't read much about it either.

➢ I paid a lot of attention to technical standards a couple of decades ago, writing a book (in two editions) and some articles and starting a newsletter for NISO—but, oddly enough, I was *never* one of RLG's active participants on standards committees. I haven't paid much attention to the standards process for quite a while.

➢ I still love typography and wrote a book about desktop publishing…but I haven't used software labeled as desktop publishing software since I gave up on Corel Ventura early this century. I can't imagine doing a book on "desktop layout using Word"—but, sooner or later, I might do that special issue of *C&I* with some comments about basic "desktop" typography. You know: The one that was supposed to happen in July 2006. Maybe July 2008?

➢ I wrote or cowrote four books about online catalogs—another area I've generally ignored for roughly a decade.

➢ Some people still think *Cites & Insights* is primarily about personal computing. It's not.

So what's falling by the wayside now? I need to go through that paper and see where I can add value.

[Later:] It might make sense to add a few notes to this essay *as* I'm going through the folders recycling source material. So far, I'm not tossing as much stuff as I'd like, but here's what I'm seeing:

➢ I had a bunch of stuff in the NET MEDIA folder about folksonomy and tagging and whether the web's good or bad for writers. Except for a few radicals, I believe the whole "folksonomy" discussion is settling down to nuances: Accepting that we need *both* professional cataloging and indexing *and* more casual methods, possibly

including the "wisdom of the crowds." Recycle. Whether the web's good or bad for writers? "Yes" is the only plausible answer. Recycle.

➢ *Loads* of stuff commenting on either *Everything is Miscellaneous* or *The Cult of the Amateur*. Hot stuff, both within liblogs and elsewhere. I was saving both in a separate folder until I read the books. Just not going to happen. For Weinberger's book, see the bullet just above this one. For Keen's diatribe…life is too short. Recycle.

➢ While LIBRARY ACCESS TO SCHOLARSHIP remains overstuffed, I've winnowed out material on academic libraries *acting* as publishers. Not because I don't think it's important (I do) or because I'm against it (I'm for it and also think *public* libraries should be doing more to tell the stories of their communities), but because it's out of scope for this ejournal.

➢ COPYRIGHT? I have four folders but I'm back to lumping everything together. Something needs to give. I'm not sure what.

➢ Going through the mound of stuff for TRENDS & QUICK TAKES, I find I have little desire at this point to discuss Second Life, the FCC's new attempts to stomp out violent television, strange videos about students, efforts to regulate search engines…

➢ Then there's MAKING IT WORK. Lately, I've gotten *very* selective about what I print to save—but I still have more than a 2" stack of paper here. Given that it's now clear that I don't have time for a separate *Making it Work* publication for at least the next six months or so, that's too much. I'm scrapping source documents about MARC, online catalogs, Five Weeks, gaming in libraries, the future of the reference desk and other topics—all worthwhile but too much to even consider in the short term.

UnConclusion

No fancy conclusions here. Just some of my thoughts at a juncture of sorts. A few notes in other areas:

➢ I'd say *Walt at random* could be erratic in the near future—but *Walt at random* has **always** been erratic. It may have more PLN-related stuff. It might return to some old themes; it might go in new directions. It could even disappear for weeks at a time—just like most other liblogs.

➢ I plan to start trimming my Bloglines subscription list so I can keep up with things—and that's going to be difficult. At the same time, I'll be starting another Bloglines list on a different account, specifically subscribing to blogs that deal with library leadership and some interesting leadership blogs from outside the library

community. When that account is reasonably well populated, I expect to make the account name public; the "blogroll" of sorts will be one aspect of the PALINET Leadership Network.

➢ While my first experiment in publish-on-demand self-publishing has done well enough not to be a failure (but not yet well enough to be a success), *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples* is off to a rocky start. Much as I support ILL, I was a little troubled to hear that libraries were attempting to borrow the book from other libraries at a point that fewer than *two dozen copies* had sold. It's still early—but after twelve weeks (and a nice mention in *AL Direct*), the book has yet to sell four dozen copies. I'll probably still do the academic library equivalent since most of the research is done—but I find that I have less and less energy to devote to finishing that research, given how far I am from earning even minimum wage for the time spent on the public library book. Future *Cites & Insights* books may be affected by this experience. I believe *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples* could be worth much more than $29.50 to a few thousand public libraries. So far, nobody's said otherwise—but then, so far, nobody's said much of anything. I can certainly understand why risks of this sort don't happen, or why books with specifically useful appeal in the library field sometimes carry such high prices. But, as I say, it's still early…

If I sound discouraged here, I'm not (except for *Public Library Blogs: 252 Examples*). I'm enthusiastic about the new situation. I think the PALINET people are great. I believe decisions are going the right way. I think we're going to produce something worthwhile. (Can you get your hands on it if you're not in a PALINET library? With luck, I'll have an announcement next issue…or watch *Walt at random*.) I'm excited, challenged, up—but I'm also being realistic about energy and where it's applied.

Following Up:
On the Literature

Full disclosure: Many (most?) of these additional comments on library literature are *not* responses to my August 2007 essay, at least not directly. Think of this as dipping again into an ongoing stream of discussion.

Rachel Singer Gordon, the *Liminal Librarian* (www.lisjobs.com/blog/), posted "Reading, 'riting, and ranting" on August 13, 2007. She notes earlier discussion and questions Stephanie Brown's assertion that "librarians are writing more on blogs than in print." Gordon's "not so sure" about this.

> *Some* librarians are writing more on blogs than in print. Some librarians are reading more on blogs than in print. Some librarians still wouldn't know a blog if it came up and bit them. I think it's more useful to argue that different formats serve different purposes. Brown quotes Stephen Abram along the lines of: "It doesn't matter where you write, just get your ideas out there." Well, yes, and no. It does matter where you write if you're working towards tenure. It does matter where you write if you are targeting a specific audience, or trying to impress your boss, or your work needs some editing, if you are worried about the longevity of your work, or want a bigger audience than might flock to your brand new blog, or … It does matter where you write if you are concerned about timeliness or if your thoughts flow more freely in a more informal medium or if you have a built in audience online, or …

One could argue some of those points. *Should* only formal print publishing count towards tenure? Since I've never been in a situation where that was an issue, I'll avoid the issue. Does print publishing *really* assure longevity or reach a bigger audience? Unclear—just as blog posts aren't all *that* ephemeral in some cases. Gordon doesn't hide her role as a consulting editor to Information Today's book division, so that may not matter. And after that string of "it does matter"s, Gordon comes down firmly (and in my opinion correctly) on both sides:

> In principle, though, Abram has it right. The answer to the question of blogs or print is: YES. The more of us that participate, in whatever medium, the wealthier and more robust our profession.

I would argue that we benefit from *informed* participation or at least participation when people have something to say. I'm not sure we benefit all that much from forced participation, and I'm afraid some portion of the literature really is forced participation, written to satisfy job requirements.

There's more to the post. I'm amused that she closes with a throwaway line, "Then again, you could always self-publish on Amazon.com!" You could indeed: I began the process of making *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change* available through Amazon three days after this post appeared, uploading the content and cover on August 16, 2007.

why I choose blogging
Morgan Wilson posted this on August 15, 2007 at *explodedlibrary.info* (www.explodedlibrary.info). He is following up on my essay and Lorcan Dempsey's comment on that essay—specifically, the point that

the term "grey literature" could apply *either* to blogs and non-refereed ejournals (because they're excluded from indexing services) *or* to much of the professional library literature (because it's, well, gray, but also because much of the *journal* literature is difficult to locate in full text, particularly for non-librarians).

Wilson's own take on the situation:

> It is a valid point that because blogs are not indexed and systematically archived, they may be very difficult to find in the future, even more difficult to find than a peer reviewed article published in an obscure library journal. I think it's likely that as the blog medium develops and matures, more blogs will be indexed and archived in some form, if only on a selective basis (thus requiring the involvement of some sort of gatekeeper). This has already happened with projects like the Internet Archive and projects like PANDORA in Australia. My other response to this, is to trust that if a blog post had any impact, it may have been noticed by someone else—and that even if the blog disappears, some of the traces which the blog left on the blogosphere during its time may remain. That answer might not be be satisfying to a researcher, but as a writer, it suffices for me. It's not quite the same as producing a physical item, such as a book or a printed journal article, and knowing that the physical item will be around long after I'm gone. But there's more to posterity than physical objects—what is the point of being published if it means that you are less likely to be read in the present and short-term future than if your words were available online right now? Which reminds me that I don't care much for posterity—I care more about what I'm writing now than what has happened to what I wrote five years ago.
>
> I'd rather my words be scattered in the gigantic haystack where most people are playing than held in a closed stack where only the elite are allowed in.
>
> There are other reasons why I choose blogging—I'm not going into them all here, but the medium of academic writing increasingly seems broken in the twenty-first century. Rising serial costs are making these sources even more inaccessible and obscure. There's also the problem of the unacceptable delays between submission and publication (even up to five years!). It's a game which has zero appeal to me, which is ok, because I probably wouldn't play it very well anyway. And so I finish where I began, each to her or his own.

I play both sides of the print-and-electronic divide. My new position aims to build an online portal combining essays, collaborative pieces, exchanges of information and opinion and more—all of it electronic, most of it quite different from what I've done so far (I won't be writing much of it). Will that portal offer resources that are as important to librarians who use them as traditional library literature? I hope so—but they'll be different.

Communication

Lorcan Dempsey added more comments about the library literature in this August 20, 2007 post at *Lorcan Dempsey's blog* (orweblog.oclc.org). A few excerpts from a post **worth reading in its entirety**:

> I write quite a bit on this blog. It has been an interesting experience. From a writing point of view I find it quite liberating. Over the years I have written quite a lot for the professional literature. However, I write slowly. For me, the main procedural difference here is twofold. The first is that entries never get long enough to worry about structure. And the second is a continuing sense that this is still a fugitive medium. This means that an entry can be dispatched relatively quickly… It is good to have a place to 'publish' short pieces, to comment on what is going on, and to have stuff commented on…
>
> It is also nice to see posts or concepts discussed here get into wider circulation. It is interesting to see blog entries being cited in the 'literature'. Although it is very difficult to get a real sense of readership. That said, I do sometimes wonder about the opportunity cost of writing here in the context of a broader set of writing opportunities (or reading time, or whatever, …)…
>
> I sometimes wonder about *curation* and about *record*, especially given the volume of material now 'published' here. It has gone beyond 'just for the moment.' Much of what is in blogs is not worth holding onto, some is, as is shown by citation patterns. We don't have good models here. There is a tension between the now (where the library literature and associated apparatus is difficult to access, to the extent, I suggest, that it is the new 'gray' literature, while the network literature is readily available) and the record (where we don't have professional practices and services to ensure continued access for the 'blog' literature, while we do for the classical literature). And yes—we are seeing some closing of this gap. But slowly.
>
> However, I think we have a very dreary 'published' literature. We have a set of niche publications, many of little sustained interest. The literature is a citation farm for those involved in formal research activity, and in the US, a necessary career convenience for those librarians who work within the tenure system. I remember once sending an email to a university colleague asking had she a copy of an article. This was on the basis of a related article which I thought was very good. She responded bemusedly that I shouldn't be reading this article, that it was just something churned out towards an application for tenure. There are certainly many interesting articles published, but I wonder about the system as a whole.

Sarah Houghton-Jan followed up in "Library literature: academic and generally useless?" on August 22, 2007 at *LibrarianInBlack* (librarianinblack.typepad.com). Some of her comments:

> I can speak from my own experience. My blog posts garner me far more email and IM comments, citations,

and well, recognition, than most articles I've written. And my blog is not, by far, the most popular library world blog out there. I am not in a tenure-track job, so when I have a good idea for a lengthy article, I get to decide: does it go on LibrarianInBlack.net or do I try to get it published in a professional periodical. Here are the factors I use to decide:

LiB: quick and timely publication, more readers, guaranteed publication, no editors to deal with who might possibly butcher my work

Periodical: might get paid for it, *LJ* or *Journal of Web Librarianship* holds more cachet, looks good on the resume because it stands out separately from the general one-line mention of my blog, can send to my parents who then get all happy-like that that English degree paid off after all

Admittedly, the quick publication factor is the primary issue almost every time (sorry Mom and Dad). I think that if print journals, or even our online digital journals, could get their editorial schedule sped up a bit I might be more interested in going with them…Generally, I think the most about how I can get my words out to the most number of people quickly. And that is definitely not with a print publication any more.

I hate to say it, but every time I open up *Information Technology and Libraries* (LITA's publication), I find maybe one article that is of interest and/or useful to me. That's pretty bad, considering that is my area of interest and focus. And I'm going to put myself at risk now by admitting that that's the only refereed journal I read, and only because I get it with my membership… I am going to go out on a limb and guess that many library workers are in the same boat, particularly in non-academic libraries.

So...what need do our professional publications fill? Are they filling supply or demand?...

There's more, but I'll leave it for you to read—including the comments.

Kate Davis added to the thread with "the state of the library literature" at *virtually a librarian* on August 31, 2007 (blog.virtuallyalibrarian.com). Davis considers two issues: rigor and a disconnect between the literature and library practice. On rigor, she refers to a section of Houghton-Jan's post that I omitted and finds that "the degree of rigour in the library literature still disappoints me, at times." Then there's a possible disconnect between literature and practice. Most of what Davis adds:

In my opinion, our professional literature is disconnected from practice, and often lacks applicability in a practical context—particularly in a public library context. This frustrates me no end. I can't tell you the number of times I've gone to the literature, looking to find some data to support a decision I need to make. And it's often just not there, even though I know there are other libraries out there grappling with the same issue I am.

But why is it not there? Partly, as the LiB says, because the literature that comes out of the US (which makes up a big chunk of the 'scholarly' publishing we have available to us) is driven by the tenure requirements of academic librarianship and grounded in theory.

But it's also because, as a profession (and I'm referring here to practitioners) that values information and the sharing of knowledge and ideas, and that ostensibly values scholarly information above all else (a whole issue in itself), we are woeful when it comes to conducting our own research and documenting it in the literature. Our journals should be brimming over with content. Editors should be fighting authors off with sticks. But that's not the case, is it?

I'm a big believer in evidence based practice. I want to make informed decisions, and I know the value that documented evidence has when you're trying to persuade someone to go with an idea. Part of being committed to evidence based practice is being committed to writing and publishing. We need a good base of professional literature to inform our practice. And we're the only ones that can build it.

Practitioners need to spend time taking an evidence based approach to their practice, and publishing somewhere (anywhere—more on that below) about the outcomes. Because that's the only way the literature is ever going to be relevant and useful to practitioners.

Then, in a Monty Python/Spanish Inquisition touch, Davis discusses the third of her two issues:

Right now, we're still negotiating whether blogs are a legitimate part of professional literature. My personal opinion is that yes, they certainly are. If Jo at Library X posts about his experience with Y issue, she's contributing to the professional literature.

Blog reading has a huge influence on my professional practice. Blog posts get me thinking about issues that probably wouldn't cross my radar otherwise. There are, however, differences between the way I use blog posts and the way I use 'traditionally published' professional literature. Blog posts get me thinking and challenge me to do new things. But what blogs don't provide me with is the documented evidence I need to inform my decision-making. Not in themselves, anyway. People don't typically publish the findings of their projects on blogs. But what people do use blogs for is to point to findings published elsewhere.

Wouldn't it be great if we could harness the speed and accessibility offered by blogs to publish our rigorous, scholarly, evidence-based professional communications, rather than just to point to them? Then blogs really would form part of the "most compelling and worthwhile literature in the library field today." So why don't we do it? Now there's a thought…

Is there rigorous, scholarly, evidenced-based library research that isn't getting published? Possibly. If so,

ejournals. One possible example is the open-access *Evidence Based Library and Information Practice*, a quarterly published by the University of Alberta Learning Services.

Publishing choices

T. Scott Plutchak saw an announcement soliciting contributions for a new journal, *The Journal of Electronic Resources Librarianship*, to be published by Haworth. In an August 24, 2007 post at *T. Scott* (tscott.typepad.com) he wondered why the journal was being founded.

He was particularly surprised when he saw the journal was using an Open Journal Systems template. Seeing the "very solid" editorial board and that the publishing platform was being hosted by an institution, he started asking what Haworth was bringing to the table—and what they'd be charging. I won't repeat the bulk of the post, but one issue he raises is that the journal appears to have been Haworth's idea.

> Which brings us to the fundamental question, do we really need a quarterly "journal of electronic librarianship" in the first place?
>
> The announcement says,
>
> "This journal aims to inform librarians and other information professionals about evolving work-related processes and procedures, current research and the latest news on topics related to electronic resources and the digital environment's impact on collecting, acquiring and making accessible library materials."
>
> Is it actually the case that there is so much being written on this topic, and so few publishing outlets that a new journal is necessary? You'd have a hard time convincing me of that.

As a member of LITA, I would first say, "What would appear in this commercial journal that wouldn't make sense for *ITAL*?" It's not the only outlet by a long shot. *D-Lib* would appear to be a first-rate outlet for much of what this journal aims to publish.

When do new niche journals make sense?

➢ **Good answer**: When first-rate publishable work in the niche can't get published in existing journals.
➢ **Bad answer**: When there's money to be made by publishing ever narrower niche journals.

Trends & Quick Takes Perspective
On Shoes and Ships and Sealing Wax

In keeping with this odd issue, I recalled the perfect organizing principle for these mini-perspectives.

The sun was shining on the sea, Shining with all his might: He did his very best to make The billows smooth and bright. And this was odd, because it was the middle of the night.

What's a book—and what does Out of Print mean in an age of print on demand? In May 2007, Simon & Schuster instituted a change in its standard contract language, the point from which negotiations begin. To wit, a book will be considered in print as long as S&S sells at least *one copy* a year. That's a big change from typical big-publisher practice, which is to establish a minimum sales level (typically somewhere between 150 and 250 copies a year) for a book to be considered in print.

Why does it matter? Because of reversion clauses—the clause any competent author will demand in a contract. A reversion clause says all rights revert to the author when the book goes out of print. Naturally, S&S says it's all about improved print-on-demand and increased availability of books; the CEO suggested that the only books that might go out of print are time-sensitive books.

The Authors Guild isn't happy. When rights revert to an author, they can try to resell the book elsewhere—maybe to a publisher who will promote it better. While authors can always try to change contracts, that's tougher to do when the starting point deteriorates.

Simon & Schuster calls it "embracing a new opportunity." The Authors Guild calls it locking authors in. (Source material: May 18, 2007 New York *Times* article and May 21, 2007 Associated Press article.)

The moon was shining sulkily Because she thought the sun Had got no business to be there After the day was done- "It's very rude of him," she said, "To come and spoil the fun!"

Nicholas Carr recounts an odd situation regarding the cost of storage—in this case online storage (*Rough type* post, October 11, 2007). Seems a software engineer at Untyped started using Amazon's S3 to back up his desktop hard drive. He got email from Amazon saying they couldn't charge his account based on the credit card payment information.

Why? Because the charge was $0.01—and the credit card company wouldn't handle that. Amazon waived the charge. Carr: "So utility data storage, at least on a personal level, may not yet be too cheap to measure. But it is becoming too cheap to bill."

It's sort of a silly story, to be sure. As one commenter did the calculations, that price must have meant the engineer was backing up 50 megabytes and

doing no data transfer at all. Not that S3 is expensive—it isn't—but the example didn't make much sense. (At current prices, if you store five gigabytes on S3, uploading and downloading one gigabyte per month, you'll pay just over a dollar a month—which is certainly cheap, but not "too cheap to bill.")

Realistically, if your backup needs are that small, you can probably trick Gmail into serving as a completely free backup system—if you don't mind that the long-term safety of your data is not guaranteed.

The sea was wet as wet could be, The sands were dry as dry. You could not see a cloud, because No cloud was in the sky: No birds were flying over head- There were no birds to fly…

Back to Nicholas Carr's *Rough type* for a cute little post on that always-right guru, Ray Kurzweil:

> I was flipping through the new issue of *The Atlantic* today when I came across this announcement from Ray Kurzweil: "The means of creativity have now been democratized. For example, anyone with an inexpensive high-definition video camera and a personal computer can create a high-quality, full-length motion picture." Yep. Just as the invention of the pencil made it possible for anyone to write a high-quality novel. And just as that power saw down in my cellar makes it possible for me to build a high-quality chest of drawers.

The *tools* have been democratized: "Inexpensive high-definition video camera" is no longer an oxymoron (depending on your definition of "inexpensive") and today's under-$1,000 desktops have more than enough processing power (and inexpensive software to use it) to do nonlinear video editing that would have required an AVID or a high-end graphics workstation a few years ago.

None of which democratizes creativity. I'm unlikely to write a great novel, no matter how well Word works—and switching to different software on a faster PC wouldn't help. I'm unlikely to compose great music even if I buy the appropriate software and hardware. I'm *extremely* unlikely to make a great movie.

It's not just creativity. Most creative works involve effort as well as talent. Better tools may lessen portions of the effort, but it doesn't go away. A good flick involves a host of different talents; unlike most fiction (and nonfiction), it's almost always a deeply collaborative proposition involving not only different kinds of brainwork but a fair amount of brawn as well. All the nonlinear editing software in the world isn't going to give one of the friends I could con into doing a home movie the acting talent of Reese Witherspoon or Mary Kay Place or the composing talent of Randy Newman.

The Walrus and the Carpenter Walked on a mile or so, And then they rested on a rock Conveniently low: And all the little Oysters stood And waited in a row.

Michelle McLean, the *Connecting Librarian* (connectinglibrarian.blogspot.com), wrote "With many thanks to the biblioblogosphere" on October 27, 2007. Some of what McLean has to say (reformatted slightly):

> I have been thinking about the biblioblogosphere and all the library bloggers out there, sharing experiences, successes and failures, thoughts and processes and more. I started thinking about what these faithful people have done for me, without them even knowing about it and I had to start making a list.
>
> If it hadn't been for library bloggers I would never have:
>
> started reading blogs; started reading the library literature more widely; … started my own blog, to share my own experiences; discovered the amazing resources and programs available out there; participated in Learning 2.0 and become a champion for my library's staff when doing the same;… been motivated to apply for and receive the scholarship and conduct the study tour I did in April this year;… developed increased confidence in myself, my skills and the new skills and inspiration I was receiving from your posts;… had the confidence to submit proposals to library conferences in Australia…
>
> I have progressed more professionally in the last 3 years, than I had in the previous 19. Even though my job title hasn't changed much, the work that I do, my love of it and my wider knowledge of the profession has grown exponentially…
>
> And it's all because library bloggers out there unselfishly decided to take the time to share their thoughts, experiences and more. They took a risk, put themselves out there, not knowing whether anyone would read and I again want to say thanks. I am more in love with my profession, my work and the life-long learning process that I am again engaged in, than I have ever been before. They are an inspiration to me, they give me inspiration to make the changes, small and large, to help make my library service better for our users—as a professional, I could not ask for a better gift from my profession.

I know some of the blogs whereof McLean speaks; I don't know that *Walt at random* is one of them. But we do all (or mostly) discover and learn from one another. This ejournal is another piece of that growing set of conversations. Once in a while, we can use this sort of affirmation.

"The time has come," the Walrus said, "To talk of many things: Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax- Of cabbages—and kings- And why the sea is boiling hot- And whether pigs have wings."

I have never understood Clay Shirky's obstinate "Or, not And" stances such as his dismissal of taxonomy

because he likes tagging. Here's another one, couched as a response to Nicholas Carr: "New freedom destroys old culture," a long August 1, 2007 post at *Many2Many* (many.corante.com). Bits and pieces:

I have never understood Nick Carr's objections to the cultural effects of the internet. He's much too smart to lump in with nay-sayers like Keen, and when he talks about the effects of the net on business, he sounds more optimistic, even factoring in the wrenching transition, so why aren't the cultural effects similar cause for optimism, even accepting the wrenching transition in those domains as well?

I think I finally got understood the dichotomy between his reading of business and culture after reading Long Player…

Carr discusses the ways in which the long-playing album was both conceived of and executed as an aesthetic unit, its length determined by a desire to hold most of the classical canon on a single record, and its possibilities exploited by musicians who created for the form — who created albums, in other words, rather than mere bags of songs. He illustrates this with an exegesis of the Rolling Stones' *Exile on Main Street*, showing how the overall construction makes that album itself a work of art.

Carr uses this point to take on what he calls the myth of liberation: "This mythology is founded on a sweeping historical revisionism that conjures up an imaginary predigital world—a world of profound physical and economic constraints—from which the web is now liberating us." Carr observes, correctly, that the LP was what it was in part for aesthetic reasons, and the album, as a unit, became what it became in the hands of people who knew how to use it.

That is not, however, the neat story Carr wants to it be, and the messiness of the rest of the story is key, I think, to the anxiety about the effects on culture, his and others.

The LP was an aesthetic unit, but one designed within strong technical constraints…

The album as a form provided modest freedom embedded in serious constraints, and the people who worked well with the form accepted those constraints as a way of getting at those freedoms. And now the constraints are gone; there is no necessary link between an amount of music and its playback vehicle.

And what Carr dislikes, I think, is evidence that the freedoms of the album were only as valuable as they were in the context of the constraints. If *Exile on Main Street* was as good an idea as he thinks it was, it would survive the removal of those constraints.

And it hasn't.

Shirky cites sales figures from iTunes for cuts from *Exile* and notes that some cuts are far more popular than others. Then Shirky makes one of those leaps of illogic that make me crazy:

The only way to support the view that *Exile* is best listened to as an album, in other words, is to dismiss the actual preferences of most of the people who like the Rolling Stones.

That's not true. CD sales still vastly outnumber iTunes and other online music sales. I'd wager that most people who like the Rolling Stones a lot either already own *Exile on Main Street* on CD or LP—or will buy it in one of those forms.

Shirky's further conclusion, "that freedom destroys old forms just as surely as it creates new ones," deserves the response Shirky uses shortly later for one of Sven Birkerts' arguments (noting that I disagree with Birkerts on many issues, including the ones discussed in Shirky's post): "This is silly." It gets worse: "Novels are as long as they are because Aldus Manutius's italic letters and octavo bookbinding could hold about that many words. The album is already a marginal form, and the novel will probably become one in the next fifty years, but that also happened to the sonnet and the madrigal." Tell me that "octavo bookbinding" is the reason most novels run between 60,000 and 120,000 words, given that, for example, the *Harry Potter* books are at least twice as long. I'm not sure why Shirky's so ready to write off the novel except for my underlying sense that, to him, new and digital are always better and *replace* old or analog.

By and large, the world doesn't work that way. New "freedoms" only replace old forms if the old forms are defective. Of course, I'm also a little shaky on Shirky's facts. He states—without attribution—that LPs were designed to hold 17 minutes on a side because that's what engineers could deliver and it was enough to hold 90% of classical works. Except that classical LPs started holding a lot more than 17 minutes on a side a long time ago, I suspect shortly after LPs began: I used to own dozens, maybe hundreds of LPs with 24 to 28 minutes on a side. Should I suspect Shirky's facts? Well, I suspect his interpretations…

"But wait a bit," the Oysters cried, "Before we have our chat; For some of us are out of breath, And all of us are fat!" "No hurry!" said the Carpenter. They thanked him much for that.
Constance Wiebrands (*Ruminations*, blog.flexnib.net) writes about a classroom experiment in her August 16, 2007 "Media fast." The class was reading Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, which suggests that America is being destroyed by its worship of mass media and escapism. The lecturer, Dianna L. Walker, wondered whether the fifty students in the course could survive a one-day "media fast"—24 hours with-

out any kind of electronic media. She wrote about the results in the Washington *Post*.

One student described it as "the grueling pain that was the 24-hour e-media fast." Another student "was in shock" and "honestly did not think I could accomplish this task. The 24 hours I spent in what seemed like complete isolation became known as one of the toughest days I have had to endure." Yet another "felt like I would be wasting my time" by giving up the "daily schedule"—"lying on my couch, watching television and playing The Sims2." Apparently *not* doing those things meant the student's time was wasted.

Here's how Walker's article ends:

> I'm not from the we're-all-going-to-hell-in-a-handbasket school of media thought. I use most of the electronic gadgets my students do. E-media keep us up to the minute on information, facilitate relationships without geographic constraint, make logistics easier and sometimes help us relax and fight boredom.
>
> But I do know of a world my students haven't inhabited — a world in which we may have had less ready access to information but had more power to turn it off and reflect. I hold on to the hope that we're not too far gone in our media stupor to recapture the idealistic vision of the era of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, meaningful discourse and human-to-human interaction in the public sphere.

And Wiebrand's comment:

> We recently had a weekend with no Net connection, but we did still have all the other usual diversions of radio, tv, the phone, games, music, and so on. I wonder how I'd cope without all that. I think it would probably be very good for me to switch off totally from time to time. I'd need to get over my fear of being Out of The Loop, though.

A day spent talking to people face to face, or enjoying nature, or having good food—and leaving the radio and TV and internet and iPod and cell phone turned off? Sounds good to me. I've done it, and doubtless will again. (Actually, all I need to do is leave the computer off for a day and skip the usual 45 to 60 minutes of TV: Too easy, as long as there's light enough to read.) It also sounds like a very good idea: Once in a while, turn it off and reflect.

"A loaf of bread," the Walrus said, "Is what we chiefly need: Pepper and vinegar besides Are very good indeed- Now if you're ready Oysters dear, We can begin to feed."

"No more f2f meetings…EVER!" That's the title of Meredith Farkas' July 21, 2007 post at *Information wants to be free* (meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/). But that's not what Farkas is saying—it's her quick version of a post on another blog decrying most in-person (f2f or face-to-face) meetings. The other blogger argues that in-person meetings maintain the existing power struc-

ture and that online meetings are more transparent. Farkas doesn't see that—and, I'll admit, neither do I.

I'm no great fan of scheduled meetings that always take place whether they're needed or not. Fortunately, in my last few years in an office setting there were few such meetings. Most of us had changed to scheduled periodic placeholders with an implicit or explicit rule: If there's no agenda the day before the meeting, *there's no meeting*.

I'm now in an odd position, typical of telecommuters: Meetings are likely to be asynchronous online (that is, threads of email), synchronous online (rare), phone conferences, or face-to-face meetings for most participants with me on the phone. It's early so far and there haven't been many meetings. On the other hand, I did have two face-to-face meetings early on: One with my advisory group, one with some of the people I'm working for and with. Both meetings were *enormously* valuable uses of time, and I think both meetings accomplished more than they could have without people being there in person. It's not practical to have many such meetings—but I can see their virtues.

Getting back to Meredith Farkas, she's no stranger to effective teamwork done without f2f meetings. She was part of the "Five Weeks" team: "We never met in person and we never talked on the phone. And yet we planned what was a very involved online course. It was a beautiful thing." She notes some of the reasons that particular online collaboration worked so well:

> 1. We are all tech-savvy and comfortable with social tools.
>
> 2. Most of us had met each other in person prior to this and some of us were friends.
>
> 3. We were a relatively small group of people. [Six, to be precise.]
>
> 4. Most of us can type quickly (which is essential to taking part in an IM discussion).
>
> 5. A lot of the work we needed to do we did individually.
>
> 6. Most of our meetings required very specific concrete decisions (what to call the course, how many weeks should it be, what topics to cover, etc.).
>
> I think all of these factors made it very easy for us to meet and collaborate online. I don't think that it would be so easy with a different group or a different task.

Then she gets to some of what's missing in "virtual meetings":

> There are things lost in virtual meetings. Virtual meetings start when people come into the space and end when the formal discussion ends. They are often more focused. Things are mentioned in passing at a face-to-

face meeting that become important. A lot of times, the casual discussions before and after meetings are actually more important than what goes on during the meeting… Face to face meetings enable the transfer of tacit knowledge much more easily than online meetings. I'm not saying that it's not possible in the online medium, only that it takes a lot more to transfer that sort of knowledge online than just having tools that allow us to communicate online. I think many groups could have great meetings online, but there needs to be a real effort to replicate the things we get out of meetings that aren't easily transferred into the online medium.

One of the comments on the other post noted other aspects of physical meetings:

> It's about looking people in the eye, seeing their body language and being able to react appropriately to all those nonverbal cues. It's the ability to react instantly when a question or concern is raised, rather than waiting for cumbersome written messages to make their way back and forth across the ether. As humans, we're built with a lot of communication tools that we often aren't aware we're using.

A little more of Farkas' comments (it's a long post, more than five pages, and **well worth reading**):

> There are also people who just don't do well with online meetings. Just like some people have different learning styles, other people have different collaboration/communication styles. We have to respect the fact that many people prefer interacting face-to-face, and not just because they are afraid of radical transparency. I have a colleague, a staff member who is at the bottom of the organizational ladder, who just prefers to talk to people over sending e-mails. It's the way she works best. We all have different preferences and competencies. We need to try to find a happy medium. While we can work to get people more comfortable with web technologies, there may always be people who are uncomfortable with it. I think it will become less of a problem with time, but right now, a large number of people out there are not comfortable with online meetings.

I'm comfortable with online meetings (I'd better be!). I'm not much of a "meeting person" in any case. But when the call comes to fly across the country for a day on site, I'm likely to welcome it (all hassles aside). Sometimes, f2f just works better.

"But not on us!" the Oysters cried, Turning a little blue, "After such kindness, that would be A dismal thing to do!" "The night is fine," the Walrus said "Do you admire the view?

Oh Google, dear Google, what job shall I take? What shall I do tomorrow? Where shall I lunch today?

In May 2007, Eric Schmidt was in Britain and said this about Google's plans for "the most comprehensive database of personal information ever assembled, one with the ability to tell people how to run

their lives": "The goal is to enable Google users to be able to ask [questions] such as 'What shall I do tomorrow?' and 'What job shall I take?'"

That's quoted (from the *Financial Times*, presumably) in Phil Bradley's May 24, 2007 post (philbradley.typepad.com). Bradley's immediate response: "To be honest, it's a damned stupid thing to have said, because it's going to raise hackles everywhere." It certainly did when I read it.

Robert Scoble discussed "distrust/disdain of Google" in a May 23, 2007 *Scobleizer* post (scobleizer.com). "Eric Schmidt, Google's CEO, has lost touch with how normal people think (if these quotes are correct, and that's a big 'if')… We don't want Google to know that much about us." Maybe it's typical Scoble that he apparently distrusts the *Financial Times* more than he distrusts Google—note "that's a big 'if,'" although as far as I know Schmidt never denied the accuracy of the quote (and it was being bandied about several months later). Scoble thinks "Google has to be very transparent, very warm, and very open when it comes to privacy and the data it's collecting on all of us." To be honest, I don't give a hoot *how* "warm and transparent" Google is, as long as it actually claims a goal of being able to tell me how to run my life.

"It was so kind of you to come! And you are very nice!" The Carpenter said nothing but "Cut us another slice: I wish you were not quite so deaf—I've had to ask you twice!"

Remember when *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* came out? Remember the story about someone getting a copy of the book in advance, photographing each page with a digital camera, and spreading those pages on the net using file-sharing and photo-sharing systems?

Seth Schoen posts an interesting take on that story in "Harry Potter and the Digital Fingerprints," posted July 20, 2007 at Electronic Frontier Foundation's *Deep links* (www.eff.org/deeplinks/). Excerpts:

> Perhaps the leaker didn't realize that the digital camera he or she used — a Canon Rebel 300D — left digital fingerprints behind in every image. We downloaded a copy of the leak and took a look at the images with the open-source ExifTool, one of dozens of programs capable of reading the industry-standard EXIF digital photo metadata format. As the press reported, the camera's serial number is in there, along with over 100 other facts including the date and time that the photos were taken and an assortment of photo-geek details about focus and lighting conditions.

> It may be, then, that the leaker can be traced; there are several ways Canon might know who owns (or used to own) this camera, including a possible warranty registration or service or repair on the camera. A retailer

might also have kept relevant records when it originally sold the camera. Another prospect: if images taken with the same camera were uploaded to a photo-sharing site like Flickr, their EXIF metadata might associate use of that camera with a particular account. (Flickr and other sites usually don't allow the public to search by EXIF tag values. But it's possible that Flickr itself, or a third-party spider that had downloaded all of its images, could perform such a search.)…

A large number of photographers are apparently unaware of [the embedding of a camera's serial number], although it's not a secret and is described in some camera manuals (as well as digital photography tutorials and other documentation). It's also possible to remove (or change) the EXIF tag data using photo-editing software. Camera manufacturers say that they add this data for the convenience of photographers (for example, to help them keep track of which cameras and settings they used to achieve particular effects), not to enable spying and tracking…

The post goes on to note that some recent setups might even use GPS to include information about the *location* where the picture was taken—which could make it even easier to track down the person who took the picture (or, in this case, blatantly infringed copyright). It's not just cameras. Apparently, most color laser printers add the printer serial number and date and time of printing to every page, in a pattern of tiny yellow dots. Apparently, CD burners embed a unique serial number, the Recorder Identification Code, on every CD they burn—it's required by Philips' patents—and that probably goes for DVD burners and DVDs as well. Got an illegal CD from you-don't-know-who? Because of *discussions with the recording industry*, Philips makes sure it's at least possible to trace that CD back to one particular burner.

I'm not sure any comment is required.

"It seems a shame," the Walrus said, "To play them such a trick, After we've brought them out so far, And made them trot so quick!" The Carpenter said nothing but "The butter's spread too thick!"

I unsubscribed from *Britannica Blog* after a certain brouhaha which shall go unmentioned; for me and my interests, the noise-to-signal ratio was too high. You may find it magnificent, and you may be right. Either while I was still reading it or because someone linked to it, I ran into this post that deserves mentioning and is **well worth reading**: "10 ways to test facts" by Gregory McNamee, posted June 26, 2007 (blogs.britannica.com/blog/main/, click on "Web 2.0 Forum"). I'll just give the ten topic sentences, each followed by a paragraph or two of discussion. It's a lively post, with expansions quoting sources including

General Phil Sheridan, Al Neuharth, Marvin Minsky and—best of all—the Firesign Theater ("Everything you know is wrong.") Here's the list:

1. Trust not the first answer the search engine turns up.

2. Interrogate your sources as Detective Sergeant Joe Friday would interrogate a hippie.

3. Facts are stupid things, as Ronald Reagan said, until we give them meaning.

4. When evaluating the statements of others who mean for you to take them as facts, look for the passive voice.

5. As a corollary, beware the anonymous.

6. Rigorously practice the principle of symmetrical skepticism.

7. If you're excited by a piece of news or a press release or somesuch novelty, wait a few days before you commit yourself to it.

8. Have a little fun while you're doing all this poking around and investigating and challenging.

9. Be not dogmatic.

10. The Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh suggests that we all tape this little note to our telephones: "Are you sure?"

Go read the post—including comments both perspicacious and, well, annoying. I've certainly found #7 useful—even when I've failed to observe it.

"I weep for you," the Walrus said. "I deeply sympathize." With sobs and tears he sorted out Those of the largest size. Holding his pocket handkerchief Before his streaming eyes.

There's little question that many (most?) of us use web applications more now than we did, say, two years ago. Some folks believe *everything* should be a web app. I'm not one of them. Neither, apparently, is Sascha Segan, given his August 21, 2007 *PC Magazine* column, "The trouble with web apps." He thinks Google and Apple are betting "we're all going online for our applications"—to which he responds, "We aren't, we won't, and we shouldn't." They're great as front ends for remote databases; "the problem comes when you try to shoehorn things that can be done much better off-line into the Web-app mold."

He describes AJAX (key to most web apps) as "like programming with your wrists duct-taped to your ankles" for any programmer wanting to use the full power of a PC. He asserts that no web app will ever be as stable and broadly compatible as a well-written "native app." He regards Google Apps as an interesting way to collaborate, but otherwise, "c'mon, if you really don't want to pay Microsoft for a word

processor, just install OpenOffice." There's more and it's interesting.

"O Oysters," said the Carpenter. "You've had a pleasant run! Shall we be trotting home again?" But answer came there none- And that was scarcely odd, because They'd eaten every one.

If you don't recognize the lengthy subheadings here as portions of Lewis Carroll's "The Walrus and the Carpenter" (from *Through the Looking Glass*), you really should do more reading. I have an odd form of trick memory regarding the key stanza—I always think of it as

> "The time has come," the Walrus said, "To talk of many things: Of shoes—and ships—and sealing-wax- Of cabbages—and kings. And how the pitcher holds the ball, And how he lets it go…"

Think of it as *Casey at the Looking Glass*. Don't be too snarky about this essay: Remember, sometimes the snark *is* a Boojum.

Making it Work Perspective
On the Middle

If you're not 100% with us, you're against us.

Very few people will say that outright. In the so-called good old days of the '60s, they used another version: If you're not part of the solution, you're part of the problem. That may sound more nuanced, but it's not, given that the people saying it define whether you're *really* "part of the solution" and the definition is usually pretty absolute.

Cut me some slack on this one. I lived in Berkeley (and either attended or worked at UC) from 1962 through 1976 and most of 1978-79. I encountered good examples of absolutism on both sides, as well as groups operating more moderately to make progress. I have a pretty good idea what I'm talking about: I could be wrong, but I don't think so.

If balance is boring, being in the middle can be worse. A surprising number of people and groups try to define the middle out of existence. Extremes are inherently more exciting and taking extreme positions is more likely to yield fame (or at least notoriety). But most of us live most of our lives in the middle, and I believe most sustainable progress comes from the middle.

This scattered PERSPECTIVE continues the longest PERSPECTIVE in the previous "mostly-essay issue," *Cites & Insights* 7:9 (August 2007), ON DISAGREEMENT AND DISCUSSION. (If you haven't read that issue, *please do*: It's one of which I'm particularly proud. This essay also continues some of October 2007's MAKING IT WORK in a slightly different context.) A few bits of

that essay, dealing directly or indirectly with "all-or-nothing"/black-and-white mindsets, may help set the stage for this end-of-year rant.

It **is** tough to disagree with some people, either because you perceive them as so powerful that they can do you harm or because they have a tendency to take disagreement badly and have cliques ready to jump on you for disagreeing. I see good, vigorous disagreement within "trusted circles" where we've all pretty much agreed that disagreement is OK. I see good, vigorous disagreement with people so remote from the field that they're unlikely to notice or care. Then there's that tricky middle section…

[Comment from] Pete Smith: …Circles always form. If you disagree with one part, you disagree with all, and I've seen that in various online discussions. Also, our times seem to be marked by a weird sort of non-absolute absolutism—those who are not with us totally are totally against us.

My response: Great statement there–something I've talked about but rarely so concisely: "Also, our times seem to be marked by a weird sort of non-absolute absolutism- those who are not with us totally are totally against us." I've run into that time and time again, on topics as diverse as ebooks, the One True Path for Open Access, and copyright–the last from both ends of the spectrum. And, at times, on the Library 2.0/social software area, although less so there as time goes on…

Some forces discourage disagreement, including groupthink, excess civility, open hostility to disagreement…

[Not] Going Back

I was going to recount some of my own experiences being attacked by one or both "sides" for not agreeing with them 100%. That turned out to be a bad idea. Just skimming through some of the history was discouraging but reminded me that, in many ways, *these* are the good old days.

Briefly, though, I've had experience:

➤ Being labeled an anti-ebook Luddite, dinosaur and Darth Vader because I wrote an essay that was not sufficiently enthusiastic about ebooks.

➤ Being labeled anti-copyright because I support fair use and refuse to use the terms "piracy" and "theft" for casual file sharing.

➤ Being labeled a *pro*-copyright extremist because I oppose illegitimate file-sharing, believe copyright has a useful role and don't agree that, because infringement by digital copying is easy and widespread, it's therefore proper.

➤ Being labeled as supporting an unchanging status quo because I favor thoughtful, incremental, *balanced* evolution over revolution and think "transforming" as a short-term objective

doesn't make much sense for institutions with strongly favorable public images.

➢ And, of course, being labeled anti-Whatever Bright Shiny Thing you choose to name if I raise doubts about its universal applicability and immediate efficacy…and sometimes being accused of that because I *quote somebody else*.

Then there's Library 2.0. Back when I was young and even more foolish (December 8, 2005), I said this about my own [non-]involvement in that discussion:

> On one hand, I don't really enjoy being called a naysayer, I don't really enjoy confrontation, and I have no desire to discourage enthusiasm for new ideas and services.

> On the other hand, I am seeing a certain degree of "or thinking" going on, and the term itself draws a circle: This is Library 2.0, and everything else is Old Hat Library 1.0. Since I firmly believe this is all a continuum, and I'm not that fond of disruptive thinking and the ease with which people can be labeled as Luddite/old and ready to be put out to pasture/whatever, this is troublesome. I continue to believe that words and names matter, and wonder whether the *rallying* virtues of "Library 2.0″ outweigh the *confrontational* drawbacks. "Wonder" in this case really does mean "don't yet have any firm opinion but am continuing to read, explore, and think"

> On the gripping hand, I see a growing number of explicit "middle people" getting involved, trying to make sense of all this from an *and, not or* perspective, and am encouraged by this–and wonder whether it doesn't make sense for an "accidental elder" like me to just stay out of the discussion for the moment.

Continuum. "And, not or." Gray. Balance. All related to the middle—the area between extremes. In my case, "for the moment" turned out to be "for 31 days"—the LIBRARY 2.0 AND LIBRARY 2.0 single-perspective issue of *Cites & Insights* came out precisely one month after that *Walt at random* post. That issue is by far the most widely read issue of *C&I*.

I was in the middle when it came to Library 2.0. I still am. I think it's wonderful that people are saying Library 2.0 is all about understanding *your* patrons in *your* community, then using tools that will help serve those patrons better. I consider it unlikely that the majority of "Library 2.0"-style implementations was preceded by that level of understanding—but I could be wrong. I'm *certain* it doesn't make sense for every library or every librarian to use *every* tool that could be considered Library 2.0—and, no, I don't suggest that anyone takes such an extreme view.

Magical Thinking and the Excluded Middle

There are two kinds of people…

You can finish that any number of ways, including the classic middle version: "…those who think there are two kinds of people and those who don't." I'm not even sure that one's right, but it's more plausible than most dichotomies.

Recently, one dichotomy seems to be "those who believe libraries are in peril and those who don't." I commented on this in October's MAKING IT WORK from one perspective—but it's also worth pointing out as a forced dichotomy. Here, though, there's another oversimplification: the term "libraries." It's quite possible to believe *some* libraries are in peril and others aren't. I'm in that camp. Academic libraries in academic institutions that have lost their sense of mission and seem to be rethinking themselves as nonprofit University of Phoenix branches: Those libraries may be in peril. Public libraries that focus on the most technophilic and wealthiest fraction of their communities and favor those who *don't* use libraries over those who do—they might be in peril. Any library with no librarians paying attention to the community, to new possibilities, to contemporary needs (and tools) may be in peril. The bulk of libraries? Not in peril, in my opinion—which doesn't mean they should be frozen in time.

The effect of dichotomies is to exclude the middle. Those who dichotomize are trying to force people to take one side or the other, even when the truth lies somewhere in between. In most elections, that may be necessary. In most of life, there are usually a lot more than two viable positions.

Then there's magical thinking, imbuing catch phrases with the power to shape reality. It seems to interfere with logic—or is logic "so last century"? (Another one of those phrases that has the effect of fingernails on a chalkboard.) Consider this syllogism:

➢ The vast majority of Americans—of all ages—support and use public libraries.
➢ The vast majority of Americans equate "library" with "books."
➢ Therefore public libraries should transform themselves for the "post-book era," so that they're not identified with books.

That's magical thinking. Next comes the dichotomy: Either you get it or you don't. Either you understand the *need* to transform your public library into [Insert Hot New Role Here] or you should retire. You can name your own.

Let's try another one—although this time the minor premise isn't quite as certain as above.

➢ Slightly more than one-tenth of one percent of adult Americans (but less than three-tenths of one percent) are regular visitors to Second Life.

- ➤ Regular visitors to Second Life appear to spend four to six hours a day "in world," which leaves little waking time for libraries or other non-work pursuits other than sleeping and eating.
- ➤ Therefore libraries should be populating Second Life because that's where their patrons are.

If you *don't* believe libraries should devote lots of time and money to Second Life—well, you know the sentence: You Just Don't Get It.

By now, some readers may be thinking "Walt Crawford thinks public libraries should only be about books," or "Walt Crawford thinks librarians should leave Second Life entirely alone," or "Walt Crawford thinks print books will *never* go away," or maybe "Walt Crawford doesn't believe in change." Or maybe not—I'm guessing people who dichotomize that readily and read that poorly don't read *Cites & Insights*. (I love my readers and assume their intelligence. I may insult it once in a while, but I still assume it.)

That's excluding the middle. It's painting me as anti-X because I'm not 100% pro-X. I don't think or believe any of those things.

I *do* believe public libraries should have books at the core of their services now and at least until there's clear evidence of a general long-term shift away from book reading (and that, even then, books as records of humanity's culture and achievements will continue to matter for libraries). I don't see that happening now and regard it as unlikely during my lifetime. Since there simply *is* no decline in book sales or U.S. public library circulation, it's ludicrous to extrapolate a trend leading to zero. I also assume that nearly all public libraries are about more than books and have been for a very long time.

I *do* think Second Life is a long shot as a large-scale long-term phenomenon (which says nothing about virtual worlds in general). Even its founders admit that (at least) nine out of ten people who try it don't like it. Can you imagine how librarians would feel if nine out of ten people who read a book decided they'd never read another one? Does Second Life have uses that might make sense for libraries? Probably, for some libraries; probably not for others.

I *do* think print books are highly developed technological artifacts that serve the needs of long linear narratives exceptionally well. I don't expect them to "go away" or decline significantly during my lifetime.

There's something comforting about magic. You don't have to look for facts. You don't have to weigh alternatives and recognize that different people have different preferences and needs. Just come up with pat phrases, say them often enough and maybe they'll

come true. What the heck: Maybe if Lee Rainie and friends dismiss people like me as "Lackluster Veterans" often enough, we'll die off or Get With The Program—another great fingernails-on-the-chalkboard phrase. Then again, maybe not.

Others in the Middle

Not that I want to label anyone else as being nonexistent, irrelevant or boring, but a fair number of thoughtful people take positions somewhere between black and white. If it seems as though I'm adding discussions that broaden what could be considered a negative essay—well, yes, that's true. I believe great things can come from the middle. I don't regard any of the people I'm quoting as middling, mediocre or boring. I do regard them as ready to take non-extreme positions while working to improve libraries and librarianship.

creating a flat library and the culture of maybe

Aaron Schmidt posted this on September 30, 2007 at *walking paper* (www.walkingpaper.org). Schmidt directs a young public library with rapidly growing circulation and a building that's already out of space. He wants to see that library grow in a sensible manner. The post is **well worth reading** for his discussion of a relatively flat organization—but also for his "cultural" aim. He's trying to avoid a Culture of No—but he's not quite ready to assert a Culture of Yes either:

> Instead of a Culture of No, I'm aiming to create a **Culture of Maybe**. You might not be surprised that employees really appreciate being able to discuss library issues without fear of judgment or other negative reactions. Here are some ideas for creating a Culture of Maybe.
>
> **Encourage collaboration**. Collaboration needs to be at the core of how things are accomplished. It isn't just a method of working on discreet projects, but rather a complete way of communicating and acting. Challenges to this include staff involvement with many aspects of library service, some of which might be outside their traditional area of interest or expertise. (At the NPPL it is very apparent that we>me. The group does a fantastic job of brainstorming and refining ideas.)
>
> **Listen to everyone.** This doesn't mean that everyone is always right, but it does mean that their ideas deserve consideration. Staff need to know that presenting ideas that don't get put into practice is not an indication of poor performance and that they won't be penalized in any way for doing so.
>
> **Let natural talents develop**. People are happy when they can do what interests them. People do their best work when their happy.
>
> **Make people responsible.** This is not about being able to blame someone if things go haywire. It is about letting people know what they're responsible for and that

their actions have a direct impact on the operation of the library. If employees see the direct impact they have, they'll be more likely to take pride in what they're doing. An essential part of this is providing the freedom and resources to allow people to actually do their job.

Set deadlines and stick to them. All of this free flowing conversation and discussion is great, but it must result in something. Decisions should rarely be final, however. An initial deadline and a secondary evaluation point can be set, the latter providing another opportunity for reflection, reevaluation and refinement.

Schmidt isn't abdicating his role as director. He's also not saying he'll say "Yes" to every idea—but he's trying to avoid a general air of negativity. Sounds good to me.

Should we take off those training-wheels?

Meredith Farkas posted this on October 7, 2007 at *Information wants to be free*, continuing a multipart conversation on the "training-wheels culture" that some librarians assert is too common in librarianship. I won't go through the whole controversy. Briefly, the issue is whether librarians are too quick to ask for instruction in areas where they *should* be able to figure things out for themselves, or at least *try* on their own before asking. Dorothea Salo called librarians "a timorous breed, fearful of ignorance and failure." To some extent, Farkas agrees: She's been surprised by the number of people in her courses asking for help who she thought should have tried something *before* asking for help.

> There definitely is a lot of risk aversion in this profession. I think we're getting better, but a lot of libraries do not create an environment where people feel comfortable failing… Why do some people feel like they can't learn something unless it's literally handed to them? Why can't people look things up or just — as Dorothea says — "beat software with rocks until it works?"

> We talk a lot about diverse learning styles and being sensitive to those styles. I'm someone who doesn't learn well by reading step-by-step instructions. I learn by seeing someone do something or by trying to do it myself. I remember in math class once, I came up with my own way of solving certain problems. While I'd always come to the correct answer, I'd get points taken off (remember, in math class you always had to show your work) because it wasn't the way we were taught in the book. This is just the way I am. I learn in my own way. And I've been wondering if maybe this has something to do with learning styles. Maybe some people just can't go into a wiki and learn how to use it. Maybe they need a facilitator around to show them how things are done before they feel comfortable doing it themselves. And if that's the case, then should we really be pushing them to learn in a way that runs counter to their own learning style? Should we be like my math teacher who penalized me for learning in a different way?

Here we get to the middle: Is it *reasonable* for librarians to work this way? There's no answer here but at least Farkas raises the question. She also points out one reason it's problematic, at least if too many librarians behave this way:

> The thing that concerns me most about this learning style or culture or lack of curiosity is what it means for their future in implementing technologies. Whether this is a learning style issue or not, librarians are doing themselves (and their library and their patrons) no favors when they take no responsibility for their own learning. If someone can't figure out (or be bothered to figure out) how to subscribe to RSS feeds in an aggregator without explicit instructions from their instructor, will they be able to evaluate and implement technologies at their library? Will they be able to keep up on their own as technologies change? Will they be able to learn how to use the new things that come along without a class?

These are small excerpts from a six-page post **worth reading**, as are 14 pages of comments). Farkas finds the "training-wheel culture" dangerous—but thinks you need to understand what's going on, not simply decry the problem. She also recognizes her own past: "I was one of those kids who never wanted to take off the training-wheels or the water wings." She feels lucky that she *was* pushed out of her comfort zone.

We're in different parts of the broad middle (the area between extremes), which is as it should be. I agree with Farkas (and Salo) that contemporary librarians *do* need some curiosity and a willingness to learn some things on their own. On the other hand, I wonder whether a typical librarian needs to learn how to install MediaWiki (another example Farkas uses) on their own?

The comments are lively. Dorothea Salo says that at some point your learning style is no longer an excuse. Mark Lindner thinks Salo's analysis overgeneralizes and raises two interesting questions:

> What I would like an answer to is why librarians are having an issue with people asking questions? Seriously, why are librarians questioning other librarians asking questions?...

> My other question centers around why in the heck do some of these librarians assume that everyone has the same priorities and interests that they do? Even someone who needs to know something may not be so interested.

An ARL library may benefit from a lightweight content management system open to multiple authors and collaborative editing. Does that mean the director should figure out how to install MediaWiki? Probably not. It means they should ask someone on staff (or in IT) to set up a wiki or find another fast-n-easy solution. The director almost certainly has better things to

do with their time and curiosity. Lindner got a little upset with extremes later in the post:

> I admit that there are some librarians who definitely have problems with their approaches (or non-approaches, if you will) to learning. But there is an awful lot of "preaching" in the biblioblogosphere lately about those "others." Certainly not a good way to bring anyone on board. As I said at the end of one of my recent posts: Veiled name-calling, belittling, "just get on board," and "my way is the *right* way" are not disagreement and they are certainly not discussion. They are condescending, they are threatening, and they are wrong.

You won't be surprised that one (pseudonymous) comment had The Answer, yet another classic way to exclude the middle. This charmer asserted that "all of the people you know" who favor training-wheels culture are "baby boomers" and celebrated: "They'll all be gone soon and we won't need to worry about this any longer." Gen-gen is ever with us; sometimes it's just unusually ignorant and offensive.

Farkas engaged in the conversation:

> When I get asked to put something on the Library Success Wiki for them, I tell them how to do it themselves and provide a link to an editing guide for MediaWiki. Sure, it's easier to just give an answer or put the info in myself, but it doesn't do anyone (me, them, their library) any favors in the long run.

That marks a clear difference between our shades of gray—and here I believe we're both right. My new job involves editing content on a wiki-based platform and soliciting material for it. I will *explicitly* invite people to send contributions to me if they don't have the time or inclination to learn wikitext, if they don't find the MediaWiki editing environment friendly—or if they already have something that would improve the wiki. By doing it for them, I'm doing *the library field* a favor.

Dean C. Rowan thinks it's unfair to characterize librarianship as risk-averse, noting that American corporate enterprise "is profoundly timorous and risk averse." He finds librarians *more* ready and able to experiment than others. Then he says:

> "Training wheels culture": the phrase is condescending and–no little irony–itself a fitting instance of the behavior it seeks to condemn, a facile, sweeping diagnosis that gets to the heart of nothing. It's also completely counterproductive. I thought libraries (not to mention schools, apprenticeships, mentors…) were poised to welcome all manner of queries and requests for assistance before judging the motives or lack of incentive of the inquirers. It does no good to denounce the very groups we seek to assist as lazy or uninterested.

Natalie Stephens begins a five-paragraph comment in a slightly different part of the middle thus:

> I've been in work environments where looking up an answer yourself is hands-down the preferred method of resolving a problem, and I've also been in places where the easiest way to create a sort of social capital with your colleagues is to ask them questions and allow them to give you answers. Often you find out things you didn't even know you would want to know, and they like feeling capable of instructing others, not to mention the benefits of reinforcing their own knowledge.

Sometimes—for some people, on some occasions—it's *essential* that you jump in and try things before asking for help or a canned solution. Sometimes it isn't. The matrix is complicated and uncertain. In practice, I don't think the "extremists" in this discussion were actually at any extreme. Dorothea Salo wasn't saying "everybody should always beat on software with rocks first, period." Neither Mark Lindner nor Dean C. Rowan was saying librarians should always be excused for lack of initiative and curiosity. In one or two other cases—posts elsewhere that weren't directly part of this conversation—I'm less certain.

On her own blog (*Life as I know it*), Jennifer Macaulay agreed with Farkas that we need to understand what's happening when people seem to demand training wheels—and added another possibility:

> In my experience, people are not encouraged to play, to try new things, or to figure things out on their own. As technology becomes more pervasive and more complicated, IT departments are desperate to prevent users from being able to cause major disruptions. They are employing security software, firewall rules, etc. in order to prevent users from doing damage. Software manufacturers are following suit by locking down operating systems, software packages, etc… People are discouraged from doing things that may cause problems or may go against the norm—and are thus, fearful of getting viruses, corrupting their computers or making a move without tech support. Can you blame them?

If you're wondering whether Farkas is a hidden extremist, her June/July 2007 *American Libraries* column makes things fairly clear. She offers "ten timeless tech tips," two of which are "Avoid technolust" and "Consider *your* population"—the latter specifically suggesting that hot new tools might not serve *your* library even as they work great elsewhere. The whole column is worth reading.

A few notes from Pete Smith

Pete Smith blogs at *Library too* (havemercia.wordpress.com). He's a British librarian and clear fan of the middle. Take a June 4, 2007 post, "Middle gears." In part:

> Middle gears. Yes, this is what we need. Less of the 'end of the world is nigh' thrill ride of the Saviours of Libraries, more the less thrilling but more rewarding steady

approach based on balance and seeking to serve all users and services, not just the ones you are comfortable with.

Eleven days later, Smith takes on the extremes directly in "'When two tribes go to war.'" In part:

> Two stereotypes enter. One stereotype leaves. Welcome to The Public Library Dome….
>
> In one corner, Libraries Are About Books. The key is the brand, books are the brand, diluting the brand will destroy libraries through lack of focus.
>
> In the other corner, Books Are The Past The Brand is Information and Exchange. The key is change, change is social computing, resisting change will destroy libraries through irrelevance.
>
> Both positions find support amongst librarians; not all librarians subscribe to the Library 2.0 model, as an example. Both positions have some merit. But as extremes, they have the problem of polarising 'debates.'
>
> Is there a 'middle ground' to be found. Walt Crawford thinks so, and I agree on this. But what does this middle look like?
>
> Well, I think it takes its character from a careful consideration of the new, alongside an honest appraisal of existing systems. It takes time to adopt new things, not because it is change resistant, but because it has a duty to its public as a whole. And because of that duty it does look into new services, such as digital libraries and social computing.
>
> Books play a role in the Library of the Middle. They are a key part of the public library brand; currently they have the widest acceptance and will continue to do so for some time. Any attack on books is seen as an attack on the library ideal, and aside from the virtues of books we cannot afford to alienate so many people…
>
> Digital resources must play a role. Increasingly people are used to this mode of access, and materials are more and more commonly issued digitally. Social computing is here to stay and offers libraries new ways to communicate with their users…
>
> Above all there should be a move from the sterile oppositions which bedevil discussions around libraries. We can have both books and digital; continuity and change; the old and the new.

On July 4, 2007, Smith considers another pat phrase:

> How useful is 'just do it' as advice? It's a nice slogan, but it short-circuits any consideration of issues people might have…
>
> I know it's a slogan. It's just a judgmental one, bordering on the hectoring. 'We will help you do it' would be better.

In a fine example of what being in the middle can mean, **all** of a September 10, 2007 post, "Why librarians?":

> Librarians make collections live.
>
> Or we should.

A building full of books is not a library. A building full of books and people issuing them over the counter is not a library- no matter how nice the building, or the people, or the coffee. If all a library is is a collection of books and a means to hand them out, there is no need of any people.

> A library is a collection managed, promoted and cared about by people. It is also the services that make that collection meaningful and useful to the people who come into the library.
>
> Right now that collection is rightly dominated by books, but no service can assume that now is forever; so we need to explore other areas such as online materials and digital collections, and the services that go with them.
>
> Too much of the current library debate seems to want either to move libraries back to cosy book-collection-from-home for the genteel 'who wish to make use of it' without having to worry about those who might want to make use of it but don't know how; or into a book free gaming and technoheaven for a notional youth. Neither extreme is a library; one is a limited and limiting anachronism, the other preserving a name without the meaning to go with it.
>
> A wise man once said 'a library is a growing organism.' And as it grows it needs people to care for it, guide its growth; to make it live. That is why librarians.

Do remember that Smith is in the UK. The public library debates there are quite different from debates within the US—or at least I believe they are. Nonetheless, what Smith says bears thinking about. Smith's middle position can only be seen as a call for the status quo by one who reads with mental blinders.

Will slow reading be a casualty of fast libraries?

John Miedema posted this April 30, 2007 at his eponymous blog (johnmiedema.wordpress.com). The post covers a fair amount of ground in three pages, and I think the "slow reading" idea is interesting. That's not the thrust of this essay, but it's worth quoting most of Miedema's first two paragraphs—with the caveat that Miedema is not saying *all* reading should be slow reading, but that slow reading has special virtues:

> Slow reading is about leisurely reading a book, maybe just a page or two at a time; noticing the binding, paper and font; seeking out and encouraging local publications; borrowing books from friends and neighbours; reading aloud with your kids; sharing thoughts about what you are reading with family and friends over dinner. It is closely associated with the larger slow movement, as described in Honore's (2004) *In praise of slow*.
>
> Slow reading is better for mental and emotional health, socialization, and our global culture. Slow readers seek out local content, providing an audience for local writers whose diversity sustains the larger interests of global media when its formulaic content runs dry.

The post—most distinctly neither anti-technology nor anti-Library 2.0 (Miedema applauds the idea of interactive online catalogs with patron-contributed content, which can help localize the library and the catalog)—**deserves to be read on its own**. A few excerpts dealing with extremes and middle grounds:

> We are in the middle of a cultural shift that is still learning the proper place of digital technology. For a time, we thought that books and libraries would disappear altogether in favour of computers and on-line searching; we were wrong about that; print is more prevalent than ever. But are we as literate as ever?...

> I use the phrase 'fast libraries' to refer to a trend toward the complete digitalization of libraries. We may never get there, but it is an asymptote toward which we are accelerating. We don't want to get there.

> Notice that libraries talk less about books these days, and more about information. Information is the more general term, representing ideas in all their forms: text and video, print and digital. Information is also a sexier term, better suited to fund raising (with potential benefits for book funds too). It occurred to me yesterday than in this sleight of words, we may be doing a real disservice to the fiction department. Is fiction information? I suppose it is, but when we think of information, it is not stories and the fiction shelves that come to mind. Fiction is a mainstay of slow reading, but it may be eclipsed in the shift to fast libraries…

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

> I think digital technology is terrific for doing what it does best — organizing information, performing tedious repetitive tasks at high speed, and helping me find information. But sometimes it doesn't make sense…

> To support slow reading, libraries do not need to stop growing, but they need to keep their mission rooted in the essentials — books (including the fiction shelves), local libraries, and people living in communities. The library can subordinate technology toward the creation of a culture of reading and writing.

Miedema finishes by proposing that libraries consider "micropublishing" programs to encourage small-run local publications. I've discussed this idea elsewhere and think it's an interesting and natural extension of localized library services, one that contemporary tools make much more plausible. The discussion doesn't belong here. I'll refer you to the last of the essays I wrote for WebJunction, "Your community's stories" (webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=17824).
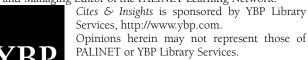
Conclusion

I believe most of us live somewhere in the middle, most of the time, on most things that matter to us. At least I'd like to believe most of us don't reduce life to a series of black-and-white, yes/no dichotomies.

As one who lived through the sixties, I'm particularly amused by people (mostly well to the right of me) who equate liberals and radicals. Phil Ochs certainly understood the difference in "Love me, I'm a liberal," a radical song that demonized liberals and made it clear that true radicals consider liberals to be worse than conservatives. Radicals (on the left or right—I'm not sure there's much real difference) dichotomize. Liberals dwell somewhere in the middle.

I changed the slogan for *Walt at random* to "The library voice of the radical middle." That's partly a joke—I'm not sure the "radical middle" *can* exist—but it reflects an underlying truth. I think most growth comes from the middle. I am well aware that some disagree with this, arguing that progress requires extremes. Try as I might, I can't accept the notion that not embracing something in its entirety is the same as opposing it. Computers are really good at yes/no decisions (it's all they can do, when you get down to the circuit level). People should be capable of greater nuance.

Note: While this is the final issue in Volume 7, it does not complete the volume for those who bind it as a volume. Some time before the end of December 2007, the volume index (including a volume title page) will appear.

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ7i13.pdf