Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

Library Access to Scholarship

You could consider this the new running head for SCHOLARLY ARTICLE ACCESS. That may change, but at least the new name emphasizes the aspect that concerns me most: The ability of *libraries* to maintain short-term and long-term access to (and collections of) the scholarly record.

The Tipping Point Continued?

I'm probably being too optimistic in viewing recent events as a form of tipping point toward the decline of the big deal and the stranglehold of big international STM publishers on academic library budgets. But I'm an optimist by nature. The May 2005 "Crawford Files" in *American Libraries* offers my own brief description of the future I'd like to see. Meanwhile, a few notable events since the January summary, in chronological order.

University of California

On January 7, the eleven university librarians of the University of California (including the 10th campus now being built and the California Digital Library) sent a letter to the UC Faculty Senate reporting the successful conclusion of negotiations with Reed Elsevier. Briefly, a new five-year contract provides access to 1,200 of Elsevier's titles from all divisions, dropping 200 titles (formerly included in the big deal) that weren't selected by any campus. The letter notes that the new contract has "arrested for now the price inflation that has been common in this market" but does not state the price. It goes on to discuss the ongoing need to address issues in scholarly communication, including this paragraph:

> The economics of scholarly journal publishing are incontrovertibly unsustainable. Taming price inflation is not enough. Unless we change the current model, academic libraries and universities will be unable to continue providing faculty, students, and staff with the access they require to the world's scholarship and knowledge. Scholars will be unable to make the results of their research widely available.

Ongoing action includes UC library work to stretch collections dollars through consortial licensing, inform librarians and faculty on the dimensions of the scholarly communications crisis and possible ways to address it, and support "alternative means for publishing scholarly materials that make high-quality peer-reviewed work available at an affordable price."

Clifton B. Parker at UC Davis provided additional information in a January 6, 2004 report. The contract includes systemwide online access and a single print copy of each title to be managed in a regional facility, so that campus libraries can cancel Elsevier print subscriptions without depriving faculty of access to print journals as needed. "The net result is that the UC libraries will spend 25 percent less on Elsevier subscriptions in 2004 than they did in 2003 ($7.7 million in 2004 as opposed to $10.3 million in 2003)."

Inside This Issue

Triangle Research Libraries Network

A story posted January 14, 2004 on *Library Journal*'s website notes TRLN has announced it will not renew its Elsevier deal and calls this "another blow to the big deal." TRLN officials said the decision not to renew the deal followed months of unsuccessful negotiation. I mentioned North Carolina State University's faculty resolution opposing big deals last time around; Duke and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill form the rest of TRLN.

TRLN and member libraries had two principal objectives in the negotiations:

1. To regain and maintain control over library collecting decisions in order to meet the constantly evolving information needs of faculty, researchers, and students; and

2. To manage overall costs in order to keep Elsevier expenditures consistent with materials budgets that

have not been increasing at anywhere near Elsevier's annual inflation rate.

Elsevier's final offer fails to meet both of these objectives.

Specifically, Elsevier insisted that libraries commit to zero cancellations, making collection policy inflexibly and "inordinately privileg[ing] the journals of a single publisher." The memo notes that this would create a growing imbalance in collections and be detrimental to scholarly associations and society publishers. The problem was magnified by Elsevier's insistence on "significant annual cost increases above TRLN's current contract terms," which amounted to more than $4.5 million per year.

The memo anticipates the loss of access to 400-500 journals per campus and the need for campuses to cancel more local subscriptions. It goes on to note that the Elsevier situation is "only the most extreme symptom of a much larger problem." As with UC (which the memo cites along with Harvard and Cornell), this is only the beginning:

> We firmly believe that universities must respond to this economic crisis of the state of scholarly communication. Libraries must be empowered, through dialogue with the university community, to obtain appropriate research material without sacrificing content and budgetary decisions to the publisher. Future library negotiations should follow the principles adhered to in this particular process, that libraries must make collection decisions and manage costs.

After some details, here's the telling conclusion: "[The libraries] will begin to explore with you new models of scholarly communication that may, in the long term, help reduce costs and make scholarly information more widely available."

MIT

In an MIT Libraries memo downloaded February 6, the libraries note steps taken to "reduce the impact of two large commercial publishers on our ability to make responsible decisions in selecting information resources for use at MIT. Specifically, we declined three-year renewal contracts that would have required us to guarantee ongoing spending levels with Wiley InterScience and Elsevier Science." MIT was offered a three-year renewal of big deals through NERL, the NorthEast Research Libraries Consortium. The two packages combined constitute one-third of MIT Libraries' budget for serials (print and online alike) and include the usual zero-cancellation policy (or an alternative requirement to buy an equivalent new serial for each cancellation).

MIT took one-year deals, taking a hit in the process. Elsevier charges more for a one-year package. The Wiley package costs about the same but won't include as much content. Both decisions pro-

vide MIT with flexibility to make decisions in the next two years "based solely on the specific needs of the MIT user community, without giving unfair advantage to specific publishers."

Harvard

A February 5, 2004 article in the Harvard *Gazette,* entitled "Libraries take a stand," notes that students and faculty logging on after winter break found fewer Elsevier periodicals. Director Sidney Verba's comment on the decision to eliminate some Elsevier publications: "It was driven not only by current financial realities, but also—and perhaps more importantly—by the need to *reassert control over our collections and to encourage new models for research publication* at Harvard." The article notes similar actions at Cornell, TRLN, and Johns Hopkins.

Some of the cuts were duplicate print subscriptions, as Harvard works more effectively to minimize needless duplication within its extensive library system. As with MIT, Harvard also arranges some consortial licenses through NERL—and decided not to take the NERL Elsevier license this year. The article goes on to quote Markus Meister, who serves on the PLoS board and discusses the need to change the structure of scholarly communications.

Connecticut

On February 9, the University of Connecticut Faculty Senate passed a resolution concerning access to the scholarly literature. "The business practices of some journal publishers [are] inimical to [access to the scholarly literature] and threatens to limit the promise of increased access inherent in digital technologies." Noting that the rising cost of journals and databases increasingly constrains library collection development, the resolution calls on faculty, staff, students, and administrators to "take greater responsibility for the scholarly communication system."

The resolution "encourages senior tenured faculty to reduce their support of journals or publishers whose practices are inconsistent with the health of scholarly communication" through the usual means: submitting fewer papers, refereeing fewer papers, resigning from editorial posts. It's a gradual call, not a plea for complete boycott. The resolution calls for university groups to "reward efforts by faculty, staff, and students to start or support more sustainable models for scholarly communication" and adds supporting language.

Donald Knuth

This is a slightly different situation—the latest in a small but growing number of cases, perhaps higher profile among those (like me) who treasure Professor Knuth's work in a range of fields

Knuth sent a 14-page single-spaced letter to the editorial board of the *Journal of Algorithms* on October 27, 2003. He is a founding editor of the journal and has been involved with it throughout its nearly 50 volumes.

When founded, the journal was published by Academic Press, with whom Knuth has been involved to some extent since 1965. When Harcourt Brace Jovanovich acquired Academic Press, Knuth asked them to "do their best to minimize the [pricing] effect on libraries," and says they did so during the next few years. Toward the end of the 1990s, however, the price started to increase fairly rapidly—and when Reed Elsevier purchased Harcourt, the increases continued or accelerated. (Knuth gives a chart showing not only the annual subscription price but also the price per page. It's worth noting that even the 2003 price for the *Journal of Algorithms*, at $700, is low enough to be under the radar for many academic libraries—but that's almost double the 1997 price.)

There's a *lot* more to the letter—as Knuth admits, he's never learned how to be brief, a failing with which I can identify. He believes the price per page should have *dropped*, since few mathematical journals still require typesetting or keyboarding—but it's doubled, not only in this journal but in "virtually every other mathematics journal produced by commercial publishers." He notes that journals produced by nonprofit organizations have generally kept costs steady. Notably, Knuth makes a direct connection between high prices and libraries: "My blood boils when I see a library being overcharged." When he wrote a letter to Elsevier, it did what you'd expect: Ignored the letter and did not reply.

This is a *very* long letter. It includes quite a bit about the STM crisis, Open Access, alternative models, what have you; I wouldn't even attempt to summarize the whole thing. It's worth noting that Knuth likes print, in part because it's the easiest way to browse through a range of articles. The letter is **well worth reading** and is available at www-cs-faculty.stanford.edu/~knuth/joalet.pdf

Knuth wanted the editorial board to vote on possible futures for the journal—to stick with it as is, switch to a nonprofit publisher (e.g., a university press), affiliate with a learned society (probably ACM or SIAM), or move to university hosting as a true open access journal.

The editorial board resigned. The new *ACM Transactions on Algorithms* will be launched with the same editorial board. Elsevier is establishing a new editorial board and plans to continue publishing *Journal of Algorithms*.

Which, unfortunately, only goes to illustrate a key problem with alternative models: They do *noth-*ing to ease pressures on library budgets unless they either replace existing journals, cause those journals to become irrelevant, or weaken those journals enough that the publishers lower prices.

BNP Paribas

This equities firm issued a lengthy report on "the impact of the development of new communications technologies on the global professional publishing industry." I'm not sure where or whether you can find the report, and it's very much an investment report—but it's also fascinating reading. The firm estimates professional publishing as a $40 billion industry worldwide, $20 billion of that in the US.

This report claims that first-copy costs (everything *not* directly associated with print publishing) represent 85% of the total costs of STM journals. I've claimed for some time that costs directly associated with print publishing represent only about 15% of the *price* for most books, but I'm a little surprised to see such a claim for cost (a very different animal than price) and for journals. The same paragraph also notes that median circulation per journal has fallen from 2,500 in the late 1900s to 1,900 at present, and that libraries now account for 85% of the sales of academic journals in the U.S.

I don't understand this claim: "The serials crisis peaked in the late 1990s." While publisher price inflation may have peaked then, I'd be hard put to find librarians who believe that the pressures on their budgets have eased in recent years!

The report has reasonably good commentary on open access publishing and some of the pressures around STM journals. It notes that some OA journals have already achieved very high impact factors. As you'd expect from an investment house, it dismisses the current publication charges for BioMed Central and PLoS as unsustainable, suggesting that $2,000 to $2,500 is a more plausible level—and even that would be an enormous improvement over Reed Elsevier's current $4,400 revenue per article.

One chart is particularly telling: The estimated operating margins ("gross profit") for various segments of publishing. STM journals run 35 to 40%; consumer magazines and book publishing, on the other hand, are both in the 8 to 11% area, with trade magazines only a bit higher.

Cries and Alarums

Established publishers won't let OA grow without casting every possible aspersion. *imi insights* for October 2003 includes Kate Worlock's "Open access: A step back in time," based on an interview with Elsevier's Arie Jongejan. Jongejan is eager to challenge "myths and misconceptions surrounding the emotive

area of open access." What are those myths and misconceptions?

First, access: Jongejan claims, "Around 70% of the audience which might be interested in accessing Elsevier's scientific, technical and medical content can at present do so." So, as long as libraries cough up those ever-higher fees for ScienceDirect, there's no access problem. Clear enough?

Second, "the perception that open access is a free and egalitarian business model." Jongejan claims OA discriminates against *authors* based on their ability to raise funds.

Third, "the underlying assumption that the current publishing process adds very little to the content being published." Jongejan mentions refereeing and peer review as important added value—and says he "believes that this is not always the case with some open access players, who take the role of review much less seriously." He quotes a BioMed Central referee policy to back his assertion—although it's *very* hard to read the quote as being less than proper refereeing.

"Jongejan does not believe that open access is either economically sustainable or more efficient than traditional publishing models" and claims OA publishers "will need to demand between $3000 and $4500 per article to cover publication costs." Note that Elsevier currently averages $4,400 *revenue* per article, including 40% pure profit.

"Submitting with a cheque potentially compromises the review process," and OA journals "can therefore be seen more as an author exposure service than a publishing operation, with a potential lack of peer review jeopardising quality control."

Jan Velterop of BioMed Central had some pointed comments about this piece, beginning: "It is never a good idea to throw stones if you live in a glass house. Especially not if you don't understand your target." He says Jongejan's statements "stretch Jongejan's—and Elsevier's—credibility to [the] snapping point."

Do you need Velterop's comment about Jongejan's absurd assertion that access isn't really an issue? "First of all, 70% is not the 100% it should be, and secondly, how would he define 'the audience which might be interested…'? It betrays supreme arrogance to pretend that one knows, as publisher, who might be interested in the research articles that are published…" Velterop leaves out one key fact: The 70% is based on an unsustainable Big Deal system. Libraries simply cannot afford to provide access under those terms.

Velterop pushes data mining as an advantage of OA. I don't know enough to comment, so I won't. He does point out that the second myth is mostly nonsense—it's almost always institutions rather than authors that pay, and OA publishers frequently waive fees for authors from developing countries.

Third is the disingenuous attack on the editorial integrity of OA journals. Velterop notes that the phrase used by Jongejan to suggest BioMed Central doesn't require originality is actually intended to do the opposite—to prevent "salami slicing" (least publishable unit) articles.

And, of course, Velterop points out that Jongejan's claim on actual OA costs is nonsensical. "Given their profit margins, Elsevier's own cost per article must be well below $3000. And that includes print, postage, discounts to subscription agents, elaborate access-control measures, subscriber databases, sales forces…at least 65 offices, massive inefficiencies, plus, according to Jongejan, a cost of between $0.05 and $0.15 per download."

The January 30 *Chronicle of Higher Education* includes "The promise and peril of 'Open Access'" by Lila Guterman, with two sidebars. She discusses PLoS and its promise—but also some of the doubters. I have a lot of trouble with the first doubt (the claim by scientific societies that it's appropriate for their activities to be underwritten indirectly by libraries), but agree with the second, at least as a potential issue:

> What's more, open access may not even save universities money. If the new publications multiply but do not immediately replace subscription-based journals, the transition period will be uneasy and expensive—and no one knows how long it will last.

> "If we have to pay for both the existing journals and the author-pays fees, we're going to get killed," says Charles E. Phelps, provost of the University of Rochester.

Then she discusses a few budget realities—like the *Journal of Comparative Reality* at $18,000 a year, *Brain Research* at $21,000, or *Nuclear Physics A and B* at more than $23,000. She quotes Carol Tenopir: "The subscription model where the library pays is beginning to break down." And she goes on to mention several of the cases where faculty are now backing libraries in reducing subscriptions—Duke along with Cornell and UC. Naturally, Reed Elsevier is "trying to be as sympathetic as we can be." And the provost at Carnegie Mellon says library woes are still not "very front and center" for faculty members at many universities: There's a lot of education to be done.

The OA discussion is long and interesting, including some figures for Duke that are a bit startling—e.g., that PLoS-level author fees for scientists and social scientists could cost the university more than its entire current budget for serials, *including* those in the humanities and medical center. Naturally, Arie Jongejan is heard from. Bizarrely, AAAS says it would have to charge $10,000 per paper for

Science to become OA because it has such a high rejection rate—but does anyone really expect *Science* or *Nature* to convert to the OA fee model (as opposed to providing open access to published articles)?

The article ends on a sad note that indicates just how much education is needed. Ricardo Pietrobon at Duke prepared a manuscript a couple of months ago that he intended to submit to a BioMed Central journal. "But, warning him that the journal might fold, colleagues at Duke talked him out of it. He sent the paper to a traditional journal instead." Sigh.

One sidebar is truly strange, in commenting on the fear of traditional publishers that governments may legislate change. Here's a statement from the International Association of Scientific, Technical, and Medical Publishers: "Abandoning the diversity of proven publishing models in favor of a single, untested model could have disastrous consequences for the scientific research community." To which a natural response might be, "What diversity is that?" At least for the "moderates," those who believe that OA journals can and should replace many, perhaps most, traditional STM journals, but neither will nor probably should replace all of them, OA *adds* diversity—particularly since there are many different kinds of OA journal.

Highlights from Peter Suber

If you care about OA, you should subscribe to the SPARC Open Access Newsletter. If you do, you've seen the items I'll mention here. If you can locate Suber's January 29 colloquy on "The promise of open access publishing," held by the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, you should. Suber handled friendly and hostile questions as adroitly as you'd expect.

In Issue 69 (January 2, 2004), Suber notes some of the highlights for OA in 2003, including the shift of objections to OA "from ideology to science"—that is, that most questions and objections are now ones amenable to empirical investigation. That's as it should be. He also offers interesting perspectives on the virtues and drawbacks of proliferating copies. I'm not all that interested in the downside that "copies interfere with the measurement of traffic and usage," particularly since I suspect that some of the very high OA usage numbers are meaningless anyway. As he notes, the only measures of impact that really work in a paper environment—citation analysis—aren't affected by multiple copies.

Issue 70 (February 2, 2004) includes Suber's "predictions for 2004," an ambitious set of 14 predictions. There are one or two I might quarrel with (now there's a surprise), but not many more than that. I'm sure he's right that there will be "more struggle over the exact definition of the term 'open

access,'" particularly given some of the personalities involved—and I'm also sure he's right about this one: "There will be less unity in the OA movement, or at least less concern to preserve solidarity in every public discussion." The question, then, is whether that's a bad thing. I would argue that it's a very good thing, and that it would be even better if OA moved from being a "movement" to being several growing and diverse subsets of an increasingly diverse publishing landscape. But then, I'm not that fond of movements (and am not ready to lump OA, open source software, copyright, and censorware into an "information commons movement," as Suber apparently is).

Issue 70 also includes an interesting essay on open access in the humanities, a fascinating essay including nine significant reasons that OA won't grow as rapidly there as in STM. I'm keeping the list for further consideration; to summarize it here would take almost as much space as Suber's clear, tightly written original.

Bibs & Blather

I had almost two pages here relating to:

- ➢ Offhand feedback I made on the commons-blog, noting that "information commons" isn't (yet) a concept that I find useful in pulling things together, "just as I continue to be unconvinced that [the term] 'information literacy' means much of anything.'"
- ➢ Greg Schwartz' entry on the Open Stacks weblog about that feedback.
- ➢ My lengthy feedback to Schwartz' entry, clarifying the earlier offhand comment and including this phrase: "I continue to be unconvinced" but admitting I could be wrong.
- ➢ Stuart Boon's lengthy entry on the Information Literacy weblog, in which he quotes Schwartz' entire posting and my entire comment, then notes "A slight back-pedalling here, perhaps?"—which struck me as odd.

- ➢ Another Boon entry, commenting on the January 2004 "Crawford Files," saying about the earlier byplay that I had "beat a hasty retreat" and saying the new column "cast a baleful eye" on weblogs. Here's how "baleful" is defined in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate*: "1 : deadly or pernicious in influence 2 : foreboding evil : ominous *syn* see Sinister"
- ➢ My startled feedback to Boon's entry—and his reply that his message was written "with friendly intent."

I've scratched most of it. Comments on feedback on weblog entries that comment on feedback on weblog entries that comment on feedback on weblog entries don't deserve too much careful re-re-re-reconsideration. (Enough "re"s there?)

Boon is, I believe, British, and George Bernard Shaw's comment about two people divided by a common language may apply. I find it hard to read "baleful" as a friendly comment. I find it hard to read a word-for-word repetition of something I earlier said, combined with several paragraphs which (in part) admit I might be wrong, as "beating a hasty retreat." I'll chalk it up to language barriers.

Library Stuff Book Perspective

To Free the Mind: Notes at Twenty

I never met Eli M. Oboler. He died in 1983, and we would never have moved in the same circles. I certainly knew his name. He was one of those who didn't job-hop much, spending more than three decades as University Librarian at Idaho State University, but his day job wasn't what he was most known for. Oboler was a charter member of the Freedom to Read Foundation, served on ALA's Intellectual Freedom Committee, chaired the Intellectual Freedom Round Table, and was active in state and regional librarianship, as an officer, editor, writer and firm proponent of intellectual freedom. He wrote a *lot* (five hundred book reviews alone!), including major works on intellectual freedom and censorship.

I picked up *To Free the Mind: Libraries, Technology, and Intellectual Freedom* (Littleton: Libraries Unlimited, 1983) at Mountain View Public Library last fall. The brief book (110 pages plus bibliography), published posthumously, is a mixture of previously published essays and new material and an interesting (and worthwhile) read, particularly at a 20-year remove. I need to read more from the giants of the field; it's always interesting and usually surprising.

Oboler gets on my nerves almost immediately by adopting Anthony Oettinger's unfortunate term for telecommunications and teleprocessing, "compunications." He uses that ugly neologism far too often in the book; fortunately, it never caught on. Oddly, as he introduces the term, he concludes that widespread electronic access to resources will *increase* the power of censors: "When every home has its own access to practically everything, via what is going eventually to be a 'wired world,' then the censor will really have a field day." That unfortunate assumption is based partly on his belief that *one* set of communications satellites will be *the* means for

global communications—and that whoever owns those satellites "will control what can be seen and heard on any individual viewer's receiver." That's a great argument against relying on a single channel of communications; fortunately, that's not how things seem to be working out.

Oboler deals in predictions and projections, and he's no better than most in this area. It was the early 1980s; at that point, widespread use of microforms seemed like a safe bet. He calls some of those projections into doubt—but accepts as likely the idea that the GPO would "almost dispense with hard copy altogether within the next few years" in favor of micropublishing. He does speak of an "obvious ease of use" of microforms, and says microfilm was "a pain in the neck to use" *until* 1938 and Vannevar Bush's rapid-selector. And, still discussing micropublishing, we reach "inevitable" as early as page 13—in this case, Paul Starr's 1974 article assuring us that "inevitable technological developments" will solve copyright barriers to making fiche duplicates of books as readers desire them. Oboler is skeptical of many things, but fails to take issue with this piece of statistical garbage:

> As far back as 1970, according to Starr, "a survey of major university libraries…showed that the ratio of total library expenditures to the volume of general and reserve circulation indicated a cost of about $4 per book circulated…The average book of 250 pages could be duplicated in fiche for 20 cents."

To which one might reasonably say, "So what?" What proportion of that $4 represents the cost of the book itself? More to the point, without magic wands making copyright go away, how would the cost of fiche duplication, storage of masters to do that duplication, staff time to handle the process, and the per-copy fee to copyright holders compare to the cost of book circulation? My best guess is that duplication-on-demand would *increase* library costs if you did real comparisons of costs.

Oboler was down on bibliographic utilities and library networks, regarding them as needless expenses and institutions that would reduce local library autonomy. He assumed that "the single purpose of the library network is…the sharing of resources," even though the bulk of network use has always been to share cataloging, not resources. He seems to believe that library networks would become computerized pools of resources themselves.

There's nothing new about financial problems in libraries. Oboler saw the shortfalls of the late 1970s and early 1980s as so severe that "among the first public services to go will undoubtedly be those proffered by reference librarians."

Surprisingly, perhaps, Oboler quotes some of F. W. Lancaster's "paperless library" prognostications

without critical analysis. Here's an odd juxtaposition, one that fails on both sides:

> Lancaster has predicted that by 1990, from 85-90 percent of all scientific and technical information will be available *only* as machine-readable data. There will be no way for the seeker after such information to get it without using the reference librarian as intermediary.

Yet Oboler has already recognized the likelihood that many or most homes would have "terminals." How does the second sentence follow from the first? It's that sort of logic, perhaps, that brings Oboler to dismiss the remarkably prescient suggestions of Fay Blake and Jan Irly that public libraries could and should use the computer and information services similar to those used by business and industry. "Freed from the limitations of the profit incentive, the public library could become the single most important community information resource, calling on existing data bases when appropriate, creating additional data bases of its own and appropriate to its community, using technology for the maintenance and updating of current community information, and providing such extensive information without user charges as the right of all and not the privilege of those who can pay for it." To a surprising degree, that's what's happened—but Oboler simply says, "the inevitable question of 'who pays for the free lunch' will have to be answered" and follows that with a remarkably dystopian comment: "With budgets *inevitably* diminishing, just how will the public libraries of the nation pay the minimums, search fees, and line charges that are the concomitant of database use?" [Emphasis added.] Why would public library budgets "inevitably" diminish? Oboler, an academic librarian, saith not—and, of course, the answer to "who pays for the free lunch" is "the people of cities and counties where library service is regarded as important."

At the end of this chapter, Oboler undermines his follow-on to Lancaster's prediction. He uncritically accepts another projection, that tens of millions of homes would have "control centers" (satellite ground stations, cable, and computer, although the latter isn't mentioned), and that "it may well be the individual at home or in the office who will be doing his own reference work. And what will the reference library and reference librarian do then?" If the reference librarian actually *has* professional skills, the answer would seem obvious…although it's a question that still gets asked all too often.

Later, Oboler seems to equate telecommunications with broadcasting. Once more, he views the ideal libraries as "*not* linked by any national network" (his emphasis). In his afterword, he seems to applaud Lester Asheim's view of the library as "*the* mediator in communication exchange." [Emphasis added] But "the librarian" was never "*the* mediator" and never can be.

After all this criticism, do I still recommend the book? Yes. To some extent, it's a period piece. To some extent, it seems to show too much uncritical acceptance of badly flawed assertions. To some extent, it's awfully gloomy. But it's worth reading, as the great ones always are.

The Library Stuff

Notess, Greg R., "Toolbars: Trash or treasures?" *Online* 28:1 (January/February 2004): 41-4.

Just as there's more to web searching than Google, there are several other toolbars, each with its own strengths and peculiarities. I've used the Google toolbar off and on, mostly off: For my own purposes, it's usually wasted space. Notess' discussion of the options, advantages, and problems of the various toolbars includes a wonderful illustration of what happens if you use *all* the toolbars: There's almost no space left for web pages themselves.

Beyond that absurdity, Notess offers enough useful information to make this a **must-read**.

A Threshold Cluster

The following articles appeared in *Threshold* Winter 2004, www.ciconline.org, as five of six articles in a cluster running from page 10 through page 32. Citations appear in page order rather than alphabetic order. I'm sure it's better in print with the context of the full issue, but (most of) the articles are **well worth reading** in any form.

Dickson, Paul, "On libraries, learning, and loving both," p.10-12.

Dickson, author of *The Library in America* (Facts on File, 1986), labels himself among those who have "a passion for libraries. He has more library cards than credit cards in his wallet and was shocked some years back "when a well-known writer on the subject of personal computers opened his syndicated column by saying he was looking for a database that would save him trips to the library." Dickson likes the serendipity of libraries; he also likes the "real-time help of librarians" and knows that that's "where the best databases are."

He speaks fondly of small country libraries "that are still vital community centers…despite shoestring budgets." He recounts early experiences with librar-

ies and discusses the ability of libraries "to accommodate themselves to what is new and, as a result, to constantly get better." He also notes that the American library system "is the envy of most of the rest of the world" and finishes a refreshingly positive essay with this paragraph:

> The systems by which we learn and get information have been in constant flux for some time now and will doubtless continue to be for the foreseeable future. The one thing that is predictable is that our libraries, led by public and school libraries, will play an essential role in adapting to and expanding on what comes next, and that librarians will be in place directing the flow of information and ideas.

"The future of libraries," p. 13-17.

This feature includes six brief essays on "how libraries, librarians, and library patrons will adapt to changing times," summing up a "future in which libraries continue to be central to our lives," according to the editor. Clifford Lynch leads off with a typically first-rate commentary on how libraries are "loosening the tyranny of geography"—but why "there's still a place for place." He notes the role of libraries as the "revitalized intellectual commons" for colleges and universities and notes, "The evidence is that place still matters—though we must be honest and recognize that it matters more or less to different people for different purposes."

I'm less thrilled with the second essay, by Janet H. Murray of Georgia Institute of Technology. She writes of information "[moving] from the analog world of paper, film, and vinyl phonograph records, to the digital world of computer archives, screen displays, and DVDs" and says this means the library "is morphing from a physical place with shelves of books to an online portal for screenfuls of information." Sorry, Cliff: Ms. Murray says books are dead, and so is place. The rest of the essay partially softens this "information is everything" beginning, but Murray regards any fondness for place and object as "sentimental attachments" and pounds in the belief that only the content matters. After all, the promise of digital technology is that "it will make valuable information available to more people with less effort." And information is all that matters. Right?

Alana Springsteen is a student at Mattawan (MI) High School and a member of Kalamazoo Public Library's Teen Advisory Board. She writes about the importance of interaction in education and at the library, and of experiences at Kalamazoo, where teen-led programs appear to be highly successful. Here's what a member of the digital generation says about technology:

> The problem with growing technology, which we have now integrated into everyday life, is becoming too dependent on it. If we forget to take the time to talk to each other, it'll just be a matter of time before we find ourselves back in the Dark Ages.

Carolyn Karis is a library media specialist at the Urban School of San Francisco. She writes about information networks and information literacy and puts down early school libraries as "warehouses of books." But she also asserts that digital resources *enrich* print materials—and that book circulation rebounds in schools after an initial technology-induced slide.

Daniel Callison is at Indiana University, Indianapolis and edits *School Library Media Research*. He writes about the learning laboratory and asserts, "Inquiry is the driving force for authentic educational experiences in the Information Age." I suspect inquiry has been important for effective learning in any age, but never mind. His concept of a "library learning laboratory" includes strong librarian (sorry, "library media specialist") interaction with students, lots of group work, all kinds of technology—and up-to-date print resources as well.

Finally, Jon Goodman and Doug Donzelli of MarketBridge Partners offer an odd combination of realism (noting the silly predictions of ten years ago) and questionable assertion (claiming, "The separation of corporate libraries and public libraries is disappearing"). They agree that physical libraries aren't disappearing—but the suggestion that public libraries are becoming corporate libraries is, at the least, disturbing. Maybe I'm reading it wrong.

McCook, Kathleen de la Peña, "Serving the demands of democracy," p. 22-25, 30.

I continue to question the urgency of the constantly redefined "digital divide," so I won't say much about this article. As always, McCook is clear, thoughtful, and makes a good case for the problems she sees. If I differ on some details, that's probably my problem. I do wonder about one key sentence: "Eighty-six percent of households earning $75,000 or more per year have Internet access compared to 12.7 percent of households earning less than $15,000 per year." Quite apart from the suspicious precision of those percentages (and the fact that, in most communities, *100%* of people in households earning less than $15,000 per year have internet access—at their libraries), two points strike me immediately:

➢ Fourteen percent of well-to-do households don't have internet access. Does that say something about the absolute necessity of such access to lead a successful life?

➢ Any household earning less than $15,000 per year in most of the U.S. has a *lot* more pressing problems than internet access: food, medicine, clothes, housing.

I'm clearly out of line in failing to sign up for the ongoing ever-expanding equity crusade, and as a long-time traditional liberal, I should just shut up if I'm not going to applaud. So I will. Since we will never, ever have truly equitable access (since the definitions of "equitable" and "access" will keep changing, among other reasons), there will always be a problem to be addressed.

O'Neill, Lucinda, "Building forward," p. 26-30.

This is a fascinating article about the new Cerritos (CA) library. I'm not sure I can or should attempt to describe the library (which I've never seen). It's refreshing to note that the director does *not* claim the new library is *the* answer: "Outside our profession, there seems to be no doubt in anybody's mind that we are truly a library of the future, or at least *one model that exists*." From what I read of the library, I certainly don't doubt that it's *one* model with quite a bit to recommend it. There's a bookstack: 225,000 books, roughly 4.5 per capita.

I could do without the quotes from Stephen Abrams with his assurance that "keyboarding skills will become unnecessary" because the "next generation of learners will be talking to their computers." And of course all kids these days are visually oriented, so search engines like Kartoo.com "will become the norm." Abrams *knows* all this, just as he knows that all kids' minds work the same mutant way. Let's just say it's inevitable.

Then there's Doug Johnson of Mankato School District, who says that future libraries won't be "quiet places with all the chairs in a straight line." That's good, but one could wish that future libraries would have *some* quiet places, since contemplation and quiet reading still have a role along with group learning and interaction. Or is that OldThink again?

The final point that struck me as odd in this article about a library I suspect I'd love is this statement: "65 percent of Cerritos residents are registered library cardholders compared with the national average of 20 percent." I wonder where that "national average" came from. Looking at PLA's Public Library Data Service figures for 2003 (thanks to Skip Auld), I see that Cerrito is at the border of two size categories for service area. In one category, the mean or average registration as percentage of population is 63.1%; in the other, it's 60.1%. In other words, Cerritos registration is just barely over average for its size—and significantly *below* the top quartile for either size (74.3 and 74.7%). For that matter, *no* size category shows average registration lower than 48%.

Martin, Robert S., "A nation of learners," p. 32.

This brief coda discusses the role of IMLS and its current premises. It's a good statement that fits well with the cluster of articles.

Two from RLG DigiNews

Declaration of competing interests: I work for RLG but have no role whatsoever in *RLG DigiNews*. For that matter, this first-rate newsletter isn't produced by RLG headquarters staff; it's produced by the Department of Research, Cornell University Library, in consultation with RLG. Published six times a year, the newsletter is consistently **worth reading** and frequently nothing short of fascinating. It's also free for the taking at www.rlg.org/preserv/diginews/

RLG DigiNews 8:1 (February 15, 2004) is 26 pages long. While everything in the issue is worth reading, I'm only commenting on the first feature article and the FAQ, both of which I found particularly fascinating. Since each issue is an HTML document (printable as a whole or in single-article chunks), page numbers may not be relevant.

Grotke, Robert W., "Digitizing the world's largest collection of natural sounds: Key factors to consider when transferring analog-based audio materials to digital formats."

Grotke is in Cornell's Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds, a collection of "over 160,000 recordings of bird, insect, frog, and mammal vocalizations." Thanks to funding from the National Science Foundation, Andrew Mellon Foundation, and Office of Naval Research, the library is now digitizing these analog recordings (on acetate disks, cassettes, and open-reel tapes, with the tapes in "various stages of deterioration") with an eye to long-term access.

This article details some of the decisions made, including the choice of analog/digital converter, possibly the most important piece of equipment in the whole process. After the project had reviewed A/D converters based on published specifications, they requested six units for in-house testing. "The results were nothing short of amazing. Even though all six had very similar published specifications, the actual sound character or lack thereof was very different. Our final decision, the Prism Dream AD-2, was the only device that did not color (alter) our signals." That's an astonishing finding—but maybe it shouldn't be.

The project wasn't settling for old-fashioned (ca. 1984) "perfect sound forever," that is, CD quality audio (44.1kHz sampling rate, 16-bit resolution). Based on investigation of what was required for accurate recordings, the project chose close to DVD-A standards: 96.0kHz sampling rate, 24-bit resolution.

The specifications for the conversion appear in detail: "Specifications like these are not typically found in the sound cards that often come built into, or bundled with, computers. Nor are they found in stand-alone compact disc recorders."

After consideration, the project chose DVD-R as a storage medium (at the data rates needed, a CD-R would only offer 20 minutes of stereo recording). The article details the tests performed *on each DVD-R* before burning and explains why the discs are created as UDF DVD-ROM discs with Audio Interchange File Format (AIFF) data files rather than as DVD-Audio discs.

A fascinating article (if you care about sound and digitization, at least) on a fascinating project. No, Grotke doesn't believe the DVD-R copies represent a final solution. "Only time will tell, but if history is any indication, we assume that in the not-too-distant future some new and better digital format for long-term preservation will appear in the market place." This project has avoided proprietary traps and any form of compression that could compromise future transitions; it's well positioned for future changes.

Entlich, Richard, "FAQ: Handwriting recognition for historical documents."

"OCR (Optical Character Recognition) seems to be widely used for providing searchable indexes of printed texts that have been scanned. Is it possible to do a similar thing with handwritten manuscripts and correspondence?"

What a question—and what an interesting answer! There's been a lot of work on a fairly daunting problem—after all, if I can't read my own cursive writing from a year ago, how can a computer? Most projects don't try to do full machine translation of the handwriting; instead, the hope is to "recognize a subset of the most commonly used vocabulary…usually within the writings of a single author" so that an index can be built to support text queries.

> The amount of research activity and the variety of clever techniques being utilized in off-line HR [handwriting recognition] should be gratifying for the archivists who maintain, and the scholars who utilize, handwritten historical documents. However, it should be noted that none of the work described here appears ready to emerge from the laboratory anytime soon.

That cautionary comment is followed by suggestions for greater involvement in this field by librarians and archivists. The conclusion ends: "Librarians, archivists, and scholars may be able to push the agenda more effectively by partnering with computer scientists who share an interest in solving this challenging problem and improving access to significant historical archives."

Again, a fascinating commentary on one of those problems you can't solve by throwing computing power at it.

The Censorware Chronicles

If momentous events have happened in the censorware area since last October, I must have missed them. Libraries struggle with CIPA decisions that must be made by this July. A couple of recent entries into the "filtering" arena claim to be more library-friendly than the traditional operations—not named here because I lack any first-hand experience.

CIPA Advice and Factsheets

ALA's website has a good set of "useful sources" on CIPA, prepared by Nancy Kranich and posted September 5, 2003 (quite possibly updated since then). I should be grateful that she includes my CIPA special—but she gets my name wrong (my professional name is consistently Walt Crawford, not Walter, and the longer form has *never* appeared in association with this publication). That grump aside, it's a long and useful set of links.

ALA also has a page of "Questions and answers on Children's Internet Protection (CIPA) legislation," including the fairly recent "Questions and answers on filter disabling under CIPA," posted December 3, 2003 and prepared by Thomas M. Susman of Ropes & Gray LLP. (The page also includes a November set of "CIPA questions and answers arising under the LSTA" and links to a PDF Q&A revised shortly after the Supreme Court decision. Susman offers two scenarios for appropriate disabling, with analytical commentary on each:

➢ The first scenario has all PCs filtered, but with an on-screen option that asks adult patrons whether they want filtered or unfiltered access, with a warning that by requesting unfiltered access the adult agrees to use the Web for legitimate purposes—and with a signed Acceptable Use Policy from the patron stating they want unfiltered access. Clicking on the option is all it takes to disable the filter. Does this scenario comply?

Susman asserts that it does, based on any common sense reading of CIPA and the Supreme Court decision, although a stickler could assert that *direct* disabling by an administrator is required. Assuming that safeguards are in place to assure that only adults use this option, this scenario should be OK.

(That's a relief, since this is the scenario I suggested last summer.)

➢ One bank of PCs in the library has filters present but not active. The PCs are labeled for use by adults only, and library staff monitors use on a regular basis. Does this scenario comply?

Surprisingly, Susman also argues that this option appears reasonable under CIPA, as long as sufficient safeguards are in place. It's worth noting that Susman is saying that both options appear reasonable. He is not offering a legal opinion or a recommendation. For some reason, I find the second option a little dicey—but I'm pleased that an actual lawyer is more adventurous.

Derek Hansen at WebJunction

Derek Hansen (University of Michigan) wrote "CIPA: Which filtering software to use?" posted September 9, 2003 at WebJunction (www.webjunction.org). He notes some key variables when selecting software and that most programs are flexible—although few (if any, at least at the time) include categories specific enough for CIPA. To some extent, Hansen (who participated in the Kaiser study) seems to interpret situations in the most favorable light for censorware makers—for example, his point that even a large percentage of overblocking will still mean most patrons won't encounter an erroneous block. I have trouble with—and disagree with—Hansen's sunny conclusion:

> Filters are a bit like children. They come in all shapes and sizes. They don't always do what they are told, although they generally get it right. They are at their best when they are they are taught to use all of their capabilities. And at times they require some discipline. In short, they'll never be perfect, but they can be influenced to reach their potential.

Free Expression Policy Project

The Free Expression Policy Project (www.fepproject.org) offers a "Fact sheet on internet filters" that's a good deal less upbeat about censorware. The version I most recently downloaded is dated September 26, 2003; there may have been changes. This 8-page listing (which includes almost three pages of footnotes) includes a good brief history of censorware, how filters operate, and specific notes on CIPA and the Supreme Court decision. It's fair to say FEPP's six-point summary of "the major problems with internet filters" doesn't quite match Hansen's conclusion. Briefly, the FEPP says filters operate as prior restraints on expression, reflect a reductive view of human expression, set up barriers and taboos rather than educating youth, frustrate and restrict research in many areas, replace professional judgment with secret decisions made by private companies, and ex-

acerbate the "digital divide" by restricting access for students who don't have home internet access.

galecia.com

There's a library filtering table/spreadsheet at filtering.galecia.com that's worth a look. I assume the author is Lori Bowen Ayre, since her weblog (noted below) resides here. The table offers information on eight different products. I printed off some pages (with difficulty) on October 29, 2003; as with everything else, contents may have changed. *Warning*: If you're easily offended, example URLs in the table may set you off, specifically in the IF-2K column. I suspect the websites are a lot worse than the URLs, but those are pretty bad.

Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT)

"Preserving the freedom to read in an era of internet filtering: Principles for the implementation of CIPA-mandated filtering in public libraries" is two pages long (one printed sheet) with some good advice. Fourteen principles are grouped in four categories:

➢ **Tailored blocking**: Blocking should be limited to CIPA-specific categories, a range of library-tailored software should be available, certain broad categories of content should be exempted altogether, and libraries should be able to add "white lists" (do-not-block sites) based on community needs.

➢ **Right of adult users to avoid filtering**: Adults should be able to have filters disabled "anonymously and without explanation"; libraries should provide clear, conspicuous information about disabling; adult users should be given access to an unfiltered computer without explanation and should be able to have the filter disabled at any time; and adults should "have a means to obtain unfiltered access that persists for a period of time, such as month or a year."

➢ **Transparency:** Information about blocking should be available to users and communities—categories, lists of blocked sites, possible adjustments—and any blocking should be plainly indicated at the point of blocking.

➢ **Privacy and anonymity:** Users should be able to use the internet anonymously; sites visited should not be recorded by filtering software; and requests to unblock should not be recorded in a way that can be linked to the user.

Mary Minow at LLRX

"Public libraries and the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA): Legal sources" was published January 19, 2004. This four-page list is divided into primary sources (CIPA itself, the decision, and re-

lated documents), secondary sources (a variety of commentaries including some cited here in previous issues and several I haven't seen—and yes, Minow includes the CIPA Special), and two sources on related state laws. A solid list of resources, with hotlinks where feasible—and it's worth noting that Minow includes Janet LaRue's odd argument that the Supreme Court did *not* mandate unconditional disabling for adults.

Nancy Kranich at ALA

"Why filters won't protect children or adults," *Library Administration & Management* 18:1 (Winter 2004): 14-18, is also available at ala.org. The article discusses the usual problem with filters and offers some recommendations. I believe this discussion overstates the case against censorware—something I never thought I'd say. Consider these sentences:

> Only about 1.5 percent of Internet sites are considered pornographic, and of those, the best filters block about 75 percent when set at the highest levels. At the same time, filters block at least 20 percent of the three billion benign Web sites—a whopping 600 million-plus sites.

I find those numbers unbelievable. I haven't seen all the studies of censorware. Perhaps there is one that finds that the best program really does block only 75% of pornographic sites at its strictest settings, but that's far below the effectiveness I've usually seen. And an overblocking rate amounting to 20% of *all* "benign" web sites, stated as a *minimum*, seems way out of line with the studies I have seen. The Kaiser study, for what it's worth, found an *average* overblocking of 1.4% of health sites (but 10% of the more controversial sites) at censorware's least restrictive settings, combined with 13% underblocking at those settings (that is, blocking 87% of porn sites). Those numbers are averages; some software did better.

There's also the gotcha: CIPA only requires blocking images and does not restrict pornographic sites (which are constitutionally protected speech for adults) in general. Whether or not any filtering programs tested in previous studies could be set to block images and pass text, such programs are now available to libraries (as are programs where customers may obtain unencrypted lists of blocked sites and programs that attempt to establish categories directly related to CIPA). Here and elsewhere, this discussion offers too many generalizations that are falsifiable at the moment.

Karen Schneider notes another issue: Kranich does not address the problem of ALA's age-neutral policy. "I disagree with this policy both strategically and philosophically, and I believe it is this issue that truly divides the ALA governing bodies from the

ALA membership and the public at large." Karen goes on to say:

> When Kranich isn't attempting to argue for ALA's age-neutral policy, she does an excellent job of underscoring something I have said since 1996: filters don't work. Most adults don't need them; no one, hearing how filters actually function, really wants to be filtered. (Some people want others to be filtered, but that's a natural human tendency.) Most adults behave responsibly in libraries, and those that don't should be dealt with through policy and procedure.

Filters don't work. I agree. I don't believe censorware *can* work in a manner appropriate for adults and teenagers in a library setting—that is, block 100% of legally inappropriate material (somehow dealing with the absurdity of treating youth aged 12 to 16 as though they're children) while passing 100% of legal material. I doubt very much that censorware can even handle access by children (which I'd probably define as kids under 10, and that may be too broad) in a sufficiently sensitive manner. The problems are real. There should be no need to overstate the failures of censorware; they're sufficient as they are.

Various Commentaries

Yes, it's a dumb heading, but I don't know how else to cluster these weblog entries and other relatively brief and usually informal items.

Karen Schneider at Free Range Librarian

A November 12, 2003 posting, "Filtering: The lowdown truth," clearly reflects a lot of thinking on Karen's part. Since the CIPA decision, she's been asked to write, present, and help libraries make choices—and she's decided to turn down those requests. "My best advice hasn't changed in seven years. Filters are bad news." She feels—correctly, I believe—that offering to advise on the best filter implementation would imply an endorsement of the concept that filtering is a good thing. It's not. Karen is no more an absolutist on access than I am, as an *American Libraries* piece made clear, but she's studied censorware long enough and carefully enough to understand that they almost inherently block access to constitutionally protected speech.

Two days later, she posted "Educating CIPA," a "top-ten list about CIPA and filtering." **Go read the post** (frl.bluehighways.com/frlarchives/000108.html) if you're vague on the basics: She distills a lot of information into ten brief paragraphs. It is worth noting, as Jay Currie does in a comment on the post, that point 6 ("Filters hide blocked sites in encrypted lists…") may not be universally true: IF-2K will supply unencrypted lists to customers. The list begins and ends with crucial points: "1. Filters block Constitutionally-protected speech. This is a fact not dis-

puted in the CIPA decision." "10. It may seem that every library in the world is filtering, but that's not the case at all. Many libraries have chosen not to filter… We don't hear about those libraries because staying low-profile is a strategy."

Jesse Walker at Reasononline

"No strings on me: Librarians fight filters" appeared in the November 23 issue and discusses at least one library that is *not* taking such a low profile. San Jose Public Libraries is ready to give up $20,000 in e-rate subsidies rather than block access—a stand supported by the city council. (As noted, $20K is only about 0.01% of San Jose's budget.) At the other extreme, Bob Watson (Franklin Park, IL) says that library would filter even without CIPA's mandate after witnessing the Minneapolis "hostile workplace" battle. Which raises an interesting issue for Franklin Park: Unless those filters can be defeated at any adult patron's request, which restores the so-called hostile workplace, isn't there reason to believe that a patron could mount a suit against the library?

Lori Bowen Ayre at galecia.com

Ayre's contribution, "Breaking the law to comply with CIPA," is a full-page blog posting that originated no later than January 18, 2004. "I woke up realizing that there is no way to strictly comply with CIPA without breaking the law." Why? Because a true CIPA filter would block only visual material that's either child pornography, obscene, or harmful to minors. She should start creating such a list for Squidgard users, making a true CIPA filter feasible. "Then the voice of Mary Minow entered my brain saying "It is illegal to view—even for research purposes—child pornography, in any form." So if she compiles a list, she could be arrested for doing so.

First Catch-22: Libraries and schools attempting to compile lists of illegal material are violating the law. Second Catch-22: Commercial products also block constitutionally protected speech, putting the library at risk of First Amendment suits. "We really have no option to create a true CIPA block list. We are forbidden by law from compiling it." Similarly, any commercial company *could* be arrested (or, rather, its officers could be—the "company as person" oddity in American law only seems to work to the *benefit* of corporations) for viewing child pornography. "Therefore, it is impossible to strictly comply with CIPA without breaking the law. Wouldn't that be the definition of bad law?"

Seth Finkelstein at Infothought and elsewhere

As you've already read here, Finkelstein has given up his censorware/DMCA research for a variety of reasons. Meanwhile, he continues to comment.

On October 29, he posted a message to Web4Lib and elsewhere (originating with his Infothought mailing list) celebrating the renewal of the DMCA exemption for studying censorware. "The Register of Copyrights has attributed that exemption primarily to *me*!" That's true. To quote from the Register's recommendation: "The Register's recommendation in favor of this exemption is based primarily on the evidence introduced in the comments and testimony by one person, Seth Finkelstein, a non-lawyer participating on his own behalf." There's more, but that's the key.

A bit earlier on the Infothought weblog, Finkelstein noted the acquisition of N2H2 by Secure Computing, makers of SmartFilter, as "the end of an era (in many ways)." N2H2 and David Burt have been long-time issues with Finkelstein, who documented the pathetic financial state of the company in recent years. The personal significance of the acquisition is that "there's even more money and resources available for a lawsuit against me."

On January 14, 2004, Finkelstein commented on CDT's set of principles (noted above), calling it "mostly a long series of wishful thinking and unrealistic assertions." It's hard to argue with his comment on the first proposed principle, "Blocking should be limited to the categories of adult content specifically set out in the CIPA statute":

> Well, I should be granted a million dollars, an A-list blog, and a professorship. *It's not going to happen*. The categories set out in the CIPA law are legal categories such as obscenity. No censorware company creates such a minimal blacklist, because these are complex legal determinations.

Going back a month, while Infothought may never be an A-list blog (for what that's worth), Finkelstein did get a nice interview at GrepLaw.org from Harvard's Berkman Center (posted December 16, 2003). My printed version runs 22 pages. That's large type in a relatively narrow column, but this is a long interview. It's also **well worth reading**, particularly if your view of Finkelstein is limited to my comments or is colored by either slashdot or the nastiness on Larry Lessig's weblog when Finkelstein said something impolitic (and, in my view, absolutely correct) about somebody who's more of a Big Name than he is. Finkelstein's thoughtful, clear answers to some difficult questions say a lot about who he really is—and, of course, there are loads of links if you want to investigate further. I won't summarize because that really wouldn't work in this case—the detailed discussions stand on their own.

The Other Side

Do you believe there are more than 260 million "pornographic web pages"? And that this is up

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1,800 percent from 1998? I don't, but that's what N2H2 said in a September 30 press release. "In the month of July alone, N2H2 identified web sites comprising over 28 million pages for its filtering database, and N2H2 now has identified over 260 million pages classified as pornography."

The release includes the kind of quote you'd expect from the director of the "Center for On-Line Addiction": "Pornography is becoming so pervasive on the Internet that it is now difficult to avoid unwanted exposure, and this makes cybersex addiction more likely, which can lead to a multitude of legal issues for organizations. There is a definite need for tools like filtering software to offer protection for those who want, or are required, to avoid this type of illicit material." N2H2 is there to help—or was, before what was left of it was purchased.

By now, faithful readers should know that most "pornography" is *not* "illicit" and even the least computer-literate readers should be able to determine the likelihood that a company with a total of 70 employees or fewer was able to confirm the pornographic nature of 28 million pages during one month. If every employee did nothing other than look at web sites every minute of every day of 40-hour weeks, with no managers, salespeople, or support staff, that comes out to more than 2,270 web-sites per person *per hour*, or more than one every two seconds. But then, consider the other proof: "A search in Google on the word "porn" returned over 80 million pages." Including, to be sure, quite a few issues of *Cites & Insights*, every commentary on CIPA, and millions of other pages that are not in the slightest bit pornographic, including N2H2's press release (unless you consider absurd commercial claims to be a form of pornography).

Longer Articles and Reports

Callister, T.A., Jr., and Nicholas C. Burbules, "Just give it to me straight: A case against filtering the Internet." Downloaded September 15, 2003, from faculty.ed.uiuc. edu/burbules/ncb/papers/straight.html

Burbules is at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, Callister is at Whitman College. This 16-page (double spaced) article argues that, while the courts have decided schools and libraries can be required to filter access, "with very few exceptions, they should not." Both writers are professors of education and fathers of young children; both formerly worked as teachers (preschool and elementary school). Naturally, both "want our children to have the educational benefits of the Internet, but to be

protected from what is harmful or dangerous, and this is what filters promise to do."

This is censorware from a different perspective than either libraries or "family" groups. The authors "say up front that parents have every right to impose restrictions on what their own children view or do on the Internet at home, just as they have the right to limit what their children watch on television"—but go on to say that schools and libraries should expose students "to a broader horizon of ideas, experiences, and points of view." That horizon may also be subject to restrictions—but not the way filters work:

> They are indiscriminate, often arbitrary, and they remove decisions about what is and is not filtered from the domain of public deliberation, placing it in the hands of automated procedures and criteria developed by invisible and unaccountable programmers who, for commercial reasons, have a fundamental interest in erring on the side of filtering out more rather than less. From the standpoint of public education, this inevitably leads to abuses and anti-educational effects.

The authors go on to point out why censorware doesn't "filter" in the beneficial sense; why filters serve more to protect teachers, school administrators, and company profits than to protect students; and some of the issues with the meaning of "harmful." A good brief discussion of how censorware works is followed by detailed discussions for "six reasons not to filter…Internet access in school":

➢ Filtering is anti-educational—both because it prevents students from accessing important and relevant material and because it sends an implicit message about the importance of obedience and acquiescence.

➢ Filtering software does not work as it is advertised. Some wonderful examples follow.

➢ Filtering is censorship—and, the authors argue, the evils that censorware attempts to halt aren't nearly as overwhelming as advocates claim. (This is an excellent discussion, although pro-filtering groups will claim it's wrong. "Our anecdotal experiences aside, according to [OCLC], 'adult content' exists on only an extremely small proportion of the Web… So, for those easily offended, a bit of free advice: If a link says, in large, flashing, red, capital letters: CLICK HERE TO SEE HOT TEEN SEX, and you don't want to see hot teen sex—don't click! *The chances of a young person who is not looking for such material finding it accidentally is negligible.*" [Emphasis added.] (Aas they noted, some kids *are* eager to look for explicit material—and they'll find it, filter or nor filter.)

- ➢ Filtering is deceptive, particularly when the filter doesn't let the user know that a site has been censored or why.
- ➢ Filtering distorts, as it disrupts the relationships among ideas and beliefs.
- ➢ There are better solutions. "Attempting to restrict access to the wider Internet because a student might see a dirty picture is like closing libraries because some pervert once exposed himself in the stacks."

Strongly recommended for a view from the "other CIPA community."

Corn-Revere, Robert, *"United States v. American Library Association:* A missed opportunity for the Supreme Court to clarify application of First Amendment law to publicly funded expressive institutions," *Cato Supreme Court Review*. (Downloaded in PDF form; I know it's pages 105-130, but can't say which volume.)

A brief note on this long article because I don't know enough to provide intelligent comments. I certainly agree that the Supreme Court didn't clarify much of anything about the First Amendment in their CIPA ruling. The issues discussed here are important. I suspect that Corn-Revere's discussion is worth reading for some with a deeper knowledge of the law involved. I was charmed to see one particular comment:

> The one remaining distinction [between this case and another in which the court struck down restrictions on speech], that public libraries—unlike legal aid lawyers—do not have a tradition or function of opposing the government simply is beside the point. It is not the mission of a public broadcasting station to oppose the government either, yet funding conditions designed to restrict editorial choice and content have been ruled unconstitutional.

I'd go a little further than that—and did, in the CIPA Special. Quoting that passage:

> The declaration that public libraries have no such role is potentially chilling. I know of no good public library collection that does not include materials that challenge practices of the current administration—no matter which "current administration" you choose to name. I would argue that any healthy public library *does* challenge the Federal government within its active collection, almost by definition. Would it be legal for Congress to say that libraries receiving Federal funds must not collect books and other resources that take issue with the current administration?

Sobel, David L., "Internet filters and public libraries," *First Reports* 4:2 (October 2003). A First Amendment Center publication; 17

pages (including two pages of notes). (www.firstamendmentcenter.org/PDF/Internetfilters.pdf)

Sobel is general counsel of EPIC, the Electronic Privacy Information Center. He was co-counsel on *Reno v ACLU*, the successful challenge to the Communications Decency Act. This paper offers a clear, brief historical background on censorware, the drive for mandated use, and challenges to those mandates. It's a good overview covering more than the immediate situation; **worth reading** and worth recommending to others who don't understand the issues.

Following Up

Correction: The article in *The Writer* noted in "Library Stuff" last issue (4:3, p. 18) was written by Arthur *Plotnik*. I have no idea how my fingers turned that into "Plotkin" in the citation. (Thanks to Kathleen de la Peña McCook for pointing out the error.) [As is usual for errors in *Cites & Insights*, the original issue will not be corrected. This may be grey literature but I prefer to maintain a clear record, flubs and all.]

The Censorware Project Hijacking

Expanding a little on Seth Finkelstein and the Censorware Project, it's not just Finkelstein who says the project's domain was hijacked by Michael Sims. The Censorware Project itself issued a statement noting that Sims, "angry at a perceived slight from one of us, shut down www.censorware.org" and asking him to transfer the domain to the project. Jonathan Wallace, a project member and an attorney, noted that links to the Censorware Project—many of them impossible to fix, since they were in list archives—still pointed to the old domain, and said "This is a colossal and continuing act of malice by our former webmaster, Michael Sims."

Bennett Haselton (Peacefire.org) offered an analogy: "If the EFF webmaster put the eff.org domain in his own name and then hijacked it from the organization, he'd be branded a traitor and a pariah in the Internet community for the rest of his life… nothing [Sims] does [at Slashdot, where he's an editor] will ever come close to canceling out the harm he did by shutting down the one-time Censorware Project website."

Meanwhile, Sims renewed his registration for censorware.org on January 19: You can check WHOIS.

You may know how I feel about slashdot: It's not the first place I'd go for sensible discussion and thoughtful disagreement. But the editors there have

a louder voice (as much as 1,000 times louder) in the online community than people like Seth Finkelstein. He says he cannot continue to do unpaid Censorware and DMCA work that might get him sued, when that's combined with existing and potential damage from well-publicized attacks by a slashdot editor. That's a shame.

Library Stuff Book Perspective
Scholarly Publishing

Scholarly Publishing: Books, Journals, Publishers, and Libraries in the Twentieth Century, ed. by Richard E. Abel and Lyman W. Newlin. (*Against the Grain* "special millennial issue.") Wiley: 2002.

This "special issue" in book form consists of 15 chapters, all but one of them single essays, from "a group of worthies"—publishers, scholars and librarians. The intent is "to offer readers at the turn of the twenty-first century as well-rounded and accurate an account as possible of the quite amazing and unpredictable sequence of interrelated events through which the information/knowledge transfer process involving books, journals, electronic, and other high-technology media, and libraries, has passed in the remarkable century just past." (See, I'm not the only one whose sentences can run a little long.) The editors asked writers to focus on the last half-century "in which the most profound, intractable, and portentous developments in the conjoined worlds of the book, the journal, information technology, and the library occurred" and asked for brief speculations. Lengths were assigned. The writers are presumed to be gurus of sorts, selected "as a reflection of their achieved status among the knowledgeable with respect to the discharge of their various roles in the worlds of books, journals, electronic media, and libraries." In other words, these are *people not to be argued with*. Most are retired; the rest (such as Michael Gorman) have "all achieved *commanding presences* in their respective pursuits."

As I was reading this, I filled a 4x6 card with tiny notes on each chapter—unwilling to actually deface the book, even though I owned it. Then I set it aside, for months longer than I had intended. Now I'm not sure what to say. These are interesting essays—if you take into account some of the prejudices and blind spots of the authors.

A few examples:
➢ Albert Henderson's lead essay makes interesting points, but he continues to argue that lack of library funding is the only *real* prob-

lem in scholarly publishing, that the explosion of journals and journal prices is warranted by an explosion in actual research. He affirms Fremont Rider's 1944 claim that every college and university's library should *double* its holdings every 16 years, else the institution falls behind and dies. That formula would have every library's holdings be eight times as large in 1992 as in 1944, sixteen times as large in 2008, 32 times as large in 2024. Such growth is absurd and has not actually taken place; the formula derived in 1944 seems a prime example of the geometric-growth fallacy. (See below, where Henrik Edelman calls the formula "statistically discredited.")

➢ Sam Vaughan's spritely "Growth and change in trade publishing: What I learned at the library" is wonderful reading and offers a wealth of real-world sense. The following essay, after a plethora of numbers, offers comments about ebooks that include the usual notion that Stephen King's *Riding the Bullet* was a watershed event rather than a stunt and ends with a flat-out statement that—despite all the evidence to the contrary—today's students and professors "will eventually buy e-books for their pleasure reading."

➢ Albert Henderson gets to bat twice, and his chapter on "Serious/Scholarly/Scientific Journals" strikes me as far worse than the worst of his lead essay. Much of the chapter seems to be about magazines, not journals. My one-word summary of the chapter can't be repeated in this family publication.

➢ I enjoyed Allen Veaner's *From bibliothèque to omnithèque*, about the inclusion of nonprint media in libraries (in particular microforms), but that may be because we share some prejudices (e.g., the "fallacy of displacement," the notion that new media do or ought to displace old ones).

➢ Chapters on the growth of public and scholarly libraries are both particularly good. It's interesting to see Henrik Edelman's sentence on page 197, given Henderson's absolute belief in Fremont Rider's formula: "The now statistically discredited report by Fremont Rider in 1944 in which he calculated that research libraries were doubling their holdings every sixteen years was a major factor in the planning process." Which process? That doesn't matter. What does is that Henderson, who claims to be a master of statistics and the record, either didn't get the mes-

sage—or doesn't accept that Rider's numbers were bad to begin with.

➢ Ralph Shoffner's lengthy piece on computerization in libraries gives more presence to his Ringgold than I remember as an observer, and he does get a few things wrong. For example, "There has been little progress towards self-charging of library materials" is surely wrong in public libraries. In discussing outsourcing, he also seems to ignore LSSI: "No academic or public libraries that I am aware of [that] have been operated under contract." Shoffner explains "gigabit" as "trillion bits per second," which is 1,000 times too high. Finally, the speculations seem sad. Shoffner assumes the triumph of ebook. He states flatly that "cataloging cannot continue to be a manual process." He anticipates reduction in circulation and interlibrary loan. I've been acquainted with Shoffner for some time; I find this chapter a little sad…and, frankly, it makes me dubious as to the level of faith I should give to the other retired authors as correctly picturing their own areas of expertise.

➢ I enjoyed Michael Gorman's "The economic crisis in libraries: Causes and effects" and Jack G. Goellner's brief "The impact of the library budget crisis on scholarly publishing." But again, that may be a case of shared prejudices, as in Goellner's final paragraph:

One prediction that can be made—perhaps the only one that can be made with assurance—about the foreseeable future of academic libraries and scholarly publishing is that it will divide along the fault line between information and knowledge. As foreseen more than a decade ago, the various electronic media will always excel in the ordering, storage, and dissemination of scholarly information; and books as we know them will remain the primary repository of scholarly knowledge. The debate about the dichotomy between information and knowledge is old and ongoing.

➢ Finally—except for a "conclusion" by the editors that seems a bit too self-congratulatory for my taste—there's Charles Hamaker's feisty, fascinating, and -frenetic final essay. I won't attempt to describe it further. It is certainly worth reading.

All in all? The editors make this claim:

The authors of these essays have provided what might prove, in time, to be the most comprehensive and faithful account of what genuinely happened in the world of the authentic book and serious journal in North America in the twentieth century.

Maybe, maybe not. I believe what we have here is capital-H History: The authorized version as written by the Recognized Experts. I recognize that where I was involved (as a little guy) in parts of that history, I find the treatment less than satisfactory—which suggests that it's like most capital-H History. Of course, I also find what I usually do when reading *Against the Grain*—a fair amount of interesting material balanced against the frequent desire to scream and start writing cheap shots.

I'm nervous about offering these mild criticisms of some of the Eminences in their fields. By the definitions used here, I'm not a "worthy" and don't expect that I ever will be. (Yes, I know, the March 2002 "Crawford Files" asserts that nobody should be afraid to doubt a Library Legend. Easy to say; not always so easy to do.)

Read it critically, if you read it at all, recognizing that there are places where the appropriate response is, "Or maybe not."

The Good Stuff

Metz, Cade, "Take back the net," *PC Magazine* 22:23 (December 30, 2003): 101-18.

I noted this article in the Glossary Special, but it's worth a little more text. I'm skeptical of the main thrust—that blogs and wikis let real people "take back the net." Metz claims early users thought the web would be the "tool of the masses, not The Man," but "Such expectations were summarily quashed by the mid-nineties. The Web didn't give everyone a voice. It didn't allow for the widespread exchange of ideas. With a browser, you could easily read Web pages posted by others. But there wasn't a comparably simple and effective way for you to create, post, and update your own pages."

Isn't that amazing? Until blogging and wiki came along, people like you and me didn't have a way to post and update web pages. That's why there were only a few hundred non-corporate web sites before Blogger came along. Right? (Remember "the early nineties, when the Web first rose to prominence"? How many readers used a browser before 1995, which I'd call the end of the "early nineties"?)

Well, now the revolution has begun: The new tools "let the 'everyuser' regain control of the Internet." Of course these tools "will soon find their way into the hands of big business," but Perseus Development says "more than 10 million" people will have built hosted blogs by the end of this year, so the triumph of the little people is assured. That's the same Perseus that says most blogs are abandoned shortly after they're built, a factoid that isn't mentioned here. Metz either doesn't know about the

power law of weblog readership and influence, doesn't believe it, or doesn't care. "For every celebrity blog, thousands are maintained by ordinary people." True. Relevant? Unclear.

But never mind all that. Once you get past the silly assertions about "taking back" the web, the faulty history, and the seeming suggestion that you couldn't post a web page unless you mastered Dreamweaver or FrontPage, you get some good descriptive reviews of weblog tools (hosted and downloadable software) and wiki tools, along with other newer tools for collaboration and interaction. Editors' Choice is TypePad as a hosted weblog service. EditMe and Socialtext Workspace both receive Editors' Choices as wiki tools.

Shirky, Clay, "The semantic web, syllogism, and worldview," Clay Shirky's writings about the internet, November 7, 2003. www.shirky.com/writings/semantic_syllogism.html

This thoughtful paper takes on the Semantic Web, a pet project of Tim Berners-Lee and W3C, in ways I hadn't thought of, starting with a seminal question: "What is the Semantic Web good for?"

> The simple answer is this: The Semantic Web is a machine for creating syllogisms. A syllogism is a form of logic, first described by Aristotle, where "…certain things being stated, something other than what is stated follows of necessity from their being so."

The classic syllogism: Humans are mortal. Greeks are human. Therefore, Greeks are mortal. Shirky gives a narrower example of the kind of syllogism the Semantic Web might allow—if people provided loads of metadata following consistent syntax: Clay Shirky is the creator of shirky.com. The creator of shirky.com lives in Brooklyn. Therefore, Clay Shirky lives in Brooklyn—a fact that isn't evident from either statement taken on its own.

> The Semantic Web specifies ways of exposing these kinds of assertions on the Web, so that third parties can combine them to discover things that are true but not specified directly. This is the promise of the Semantic Web—it will improve all the areas of your life where you currently use syllogisms.

> Which is to say, almost nowhere.

And there's *one* major problem with the Semantic Web, as Shirky spells out with charming detail—although it's not the only problem. He quotes Charles Dodgson (writing as himself, not Lewis Carroll) from his books of syllogisms and symbolic logic. Interestingly, the "sorite" (an expanded syllogism involving multiple assertions) quoted is fallacious:

> Remedies for bleeding, which fail to check it, are a mockery

> Tincture of Calendula is not to be despised

> Remedies, which will check the bleeding when you cut your finger, are useful

> All mock remedies for bleeding are despicable

> Therefore, Tincture of Calendula will check the bleeding when you cut your finger.

Objection! Nowhere in the syllogism is it stated that Tincture of Calendula is intended to check bleeding. Honda Civics are not to be despised either, but they won't do much if you have a cut finger.

Shirky says, *correctly* in my opinion, "Syllogisms don't work well in the real world, because most of the data we use is not amenable to such effortless recombination." Dodgson's example *may* have worked well in his time because Tincture of Calendula was known to his readers as a remedy to check bleeding. Now, it only works if you assume all four statements are *directly* related to one another—an assumption not in evidence, and one you can rarely make with the Semantic Web or life in general.

In the real world, we work with less-than-universal truths: As Shirky puts it, "partial, inconclusive or context-sensitive information." Here's Shirky's quick counter-example: The creator of shirky.com lives in Brooklyn. People who live in Brooklyn speak with a Brooklyn accent. And if you conclude that the creator of shirky.com pronounces it "shoiky.com," you're wrong…because, as with most real-world statements, the presumed "All" prepending the second statement is false.

He provides an example from W3C's own Semantic Web site that offers a good case *against* the significance of the Semantic Web—and there's also the little issue that compatible syntax does not assure compatible semantics. Consider this quote:

> Merging databases simply becomes a matter of recording in RDF somewhere that "Person Name" in your database is equivalent to "Name" in my database, and then throwing all of the information together and getting a processor to think about it.

Anyone who's worked with disparate databases containing name information will shudder at "simply."

Then, of course, there's the fact that most people won't provide detailed metadata and that metadata isn't trustworthy for various reasons. Beyond that, as Shirky notes, metadata describes a worldview—and worldviews differ for good reasons. I like his description of the fundamental fallacy, since it's one I've seen among ebook advocates and others as well: He calls it the "this will work because it would be good if it did" fallacy. Think about that phrase carefully when you're presented with one inevitability or another.

Yes, I've said way too much about this article but it's a keeper: **Highly recommended**.

Felten, Ed, "Predictions for 2004," Freedom to tinker, January 2, 2004. www.freedom-to-tinker.com

Felten's always **worth reading**, and I have to mention a few predictions here and there. Besides, how can you resist this introductory paragraph:

> Like everybody else's predictions, some of my predictions are obvious, some will be hilariously wrong, and all of them will be conveniently forgotten later. Also like everyone else, I'll look back at the end of 2004 and wonder how I left out the year's biggest story. But here goes anyway.

Some public figure will be severely embarrassed by a moblogged picture, leading to a public debate about privacy and personal surveillance devices. E-voting technologies will continue to lose credibility. A new generation of P2P tools will resist RIAA counter-measures—and RIAA will keep trying new tactics. DRM technology will still be ineffective and inflexible. WiFi will show up more as a free amenity rather than a paid service in hotels, cafes, and at least one airport. Voice over IP will be talked about a lot—particularly pieces doubting the security and reliability of phone calls on the Internet.

> Before the ink is dry on the FCC's broadcast flag order, the studios will declare it insufficient and ask for a further mandate requiring watermark detectors in all analog-to-digital converters. The FCC will balk at the obvious technical and economic flaws in this proposal.

The first half of that is almost certain. I'm not so sure of the second half—but maybe Congress and the courts would finally slap down the FCC at that point. I'll be optimistic and hope Felten's right, since any serious attempt to close the "analog hole" has such disastrous consequences.

The comments are also worth reading, including one odd set of counter-predictions from "Cypherpunk." I'll try to check in on Felten's seven predictions in early 2005.

Taylor, Josh, "Web stars," *PC World* 22:2 (February 2004): 97-102.

This set of head-to-head comparisons of "Goliaths" and challengers in several categories is mildly interesting—but worth noting largely because of the "best bet" among reference desk sites: "Your library's web site." NYPL is used as an example. Of course, there's a downside to using your library's web site: "You may need a library card to enjoy full access." Still, *PC World* deserves credit for recognizing that public libraries offer first-rate online services for the best possible price: Free at point of service.

The Way We're Wired

Amazon, NetFlix and Hypocrisy

Mark Stover (San Diego State) sent thoughtful feedback on the December 2003 TRENDS & QUICK TAKES item, "Amazonia Gone Wild." His second comment deserves more attention than it would get in FEEDBACK, so I'm running the whole thing here.

> In your article "Amazonia gone wild" in the December 2003 issue of *Cites & Insights* you discuss the "Search Inside the Book" feature at amazon.com. I've had my own share of strange search results when using this feature, and I'm always skeptical of the utility of full text searching, but I did have one noteworthy success that I wanted to share with you. A student was looking for information on "forced ranking systems." I suggested the usual suspects (management encyclopedias, library catalog search, business databases, google, etc.), but we weren't really finding much until I searched Amazon. A handful of references found using Amazon's "search inside the book" gave the student more leads and the actual text from several relevant books. So while I'm not ready to make sweeping generalizations about search inside the book, I do think that it definitely has value, especially if Amazon continues to expand their database of full text books.

> On a related note, you mentioned in the same article that you believe that Amazon "harms local booksellers." Obviously you think this is a "bad thing." But on other occasions you've sung the praises of NetFlix, which probably harms local video rental stores in much the same way that Amazon ostensibly harms local bookstores. While Amazon sells and NetFlix rents, I still think that there is a direct analogy here. So isn't it at best inconsistent and at worst hypocritical to criticize Amazon but support NetFlix?

> Notwithstanding my minor nitpicking tirade, I still think that you are doing a better job than anyone else at providing technology updates for librarians and others in your very readable and very affordable webzine.

Thanks for the compliment. I agree that "Search inside the book" can be enormously useful *as an extra*, as long as it doesn't swamp known-item results. My sense is that Amazon has tweaked its sorting algorithms so that words in titles show up first, but I still believe Sitb makes more sense as an advanced-search option.

Amazon and NetFlix

I haven't said this in quite a while, and perhaps never in a sufficiently straightforward manner.:

➤ If you have a locally owned video/DVD store in your neighborhood that stocks the movies

you want to rent, and you find that store an agreeable place to do business, you should *certainly* favor that store over NetFlix.

➢ Conversely, if there are no locally owned bookstores in your area, or you are repelled by the local bookstores, then you should evaluate chain stores and internet bookstores to see which ones suit you best.

I like NetFlix because it seems to use an honest collaborative recommendation engine, because it stocks almost everything and has done much to increase the visibility of foreign and independent films, because we've had excellent service—and because it's an interesting example of a "physical" business that can only work effectively because of the internet.

For us, the choice was easy. I'd had a six-month trial NetFlix membership (thanks to one of my columns), but we were renting most of our DVDs at a good local video/DVD store. About the time the NetFlix freebie was going to expire, the local store disappeared, thanks to rent gouging by the mall owner. That left two choices: local Blockbuster franchises or NetFlix. I don't care for Blockbuster, for a variety of reasons. I like NetFlix.

That's my situation. Yours may differ. For some people, a combination makes most sense: A good local store for mainstream DVDs, a minimum-level subscription to NetFlix for the stuff the local store doesn't handle. There's the library too, to be sure.

As for Amazon…well, I have some bad experiences with Amazon regarding one of my books. Maybe they're experiences that wouldn't happen again, but they left a bad taste. And there *are* good locally owned bookstores around here.

I believe that local video stores have disappeared to a much larger extent than local bookstores. I believe—without much proof—that Barnes & Noble and Borders, while certainly not as "local" as good independent stores, are reasonable alternatives when no good local store is available, where I have no such belief when it comes to Blockbuster and Hollywood Video. But yes, maybe I am inconsistent, possibly even hypocritical.

The General Case and the Way We're Wired

This *mea culpa* appears under the "Way We're Wired" flag because it's an example of legitimate differences in preferences and habits.

Set aside for the moment local tax revenue issues. Those can be solved (although it won't happen any time soon, I suspect). Fact is, some people simply don't want to deal with certain businesses and have preferred ways of buying that send them to the internet, or to chain stores, or wherever.

I don't have a problem with that. If that's your preference, that's the way it is.

For some of us, maybe most, it depends on the kind of product and the nature of the local stores. For example, I've almost given up on retail record stores because they're physically unpleasant. The volume and variety of music seem calculated to drive away anyone older than 25. I find it punishing to be in the stores.

There are local bookstores that drive away customers. I've read a science fiction/fantasy magazine editor's comments on being informed that her local bookstore didn't sell "that kind of book" and wouldn't special order such trash. There's nothing wrong with a store's stock reflecting the owner's preferences and with the staff revealing their tastes—but there's also nothing wrong with customers going elsewhere, be it Amazon, barnesandnoble.com, powell.com, or what have you, when local booksellers put down the customer's taste.

Problems arise when you do your browsing and sampling at the retail store, then buy on the internet to save a buck or two. The extreme case comes with goods such as high-end audio, where you may be using a significant amount of staff time to explore choices. I think there's an ethical issue involved here, and it's a direct way to undermine local business. I don't expect anyone to pay a huge premium to keep a badly run local business alive—but if you're using the facilities of the local business, it's reasonable to pay *some* premium, or at least talk it over with the local business before buying remotely.

I hope Amazon doesn't become the only game in town. For that matter, I hope NetFlix doesn't become the only game in town. I don't think either one is likely. Diversity in the marketplace is almost always a good thing.

The Details

URL: cites.boisestate.edu/civ4i4.pdf