

Cites & Insights

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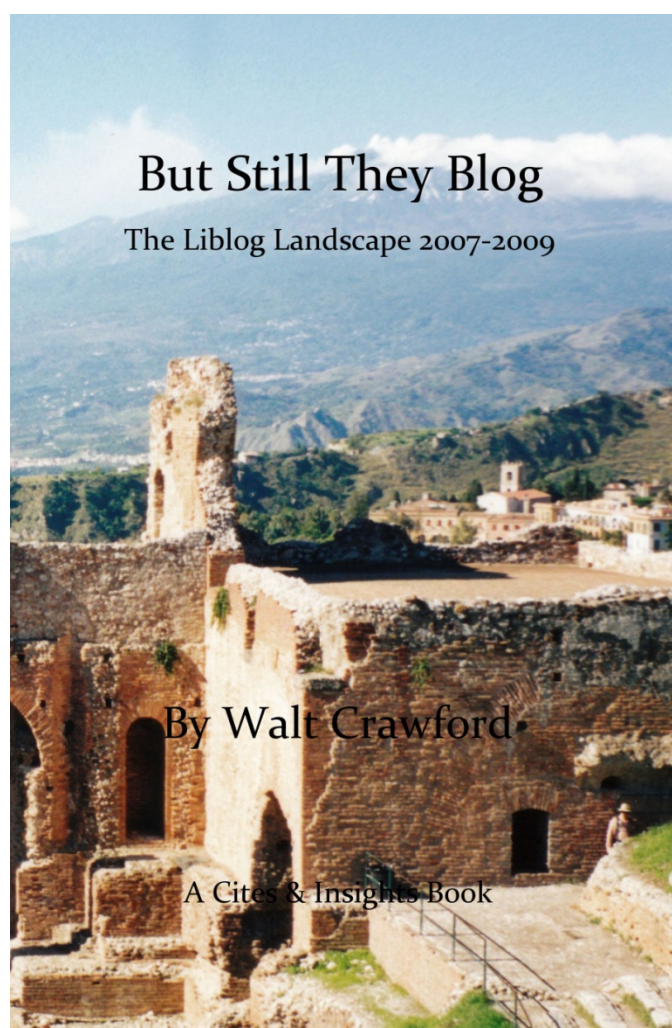
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Walt Crawford

Bibs & Blather

But Still They Blog:

The Liblog Landscape 2007-2009



But Still They Blog: The Liblog Landscape 2007-2009 is now available—at a special early-bird price through the end of the ALA 2010 Midwinter Meeting (January 19, 2010 or thereabouts). Order your copy at www.lulu.com/content/7952668; until January 19, 2010, it's available for only \$29.50 trade pa-

perback, \$20 PDF download. (After Midwinter, those prices will go up \$5.50 and \$5 respectively.)

This 319-page trade paperback provides a sweeping look at liblogs (blogs created by library people but, generally, not blogs that are official library publications), with trends, facts, figures, graphs, and profiles for each of 521 liblogs. It continues what I believe to be the most extensive survey of the blogs within a given field.

What's Here

The liblogs included here (you'll find the list at walt.lishost.org/blogs-in-the-liblog-landscape-2007-2009) appear because:

- They're in English.
- They began in December 2008 or earlier.
- They have at least some relevance to libraries and librarianship, although that point gets stretched in a few cases.
- They had at least three posts during March-May 2007, 2008 or 2009.
- They were available on the web in the summer of 2009 (even if they'd ceased).
- They were known to me—either because they were listed in the LISWiki list of blogs or the LISZen list of blogs or because they showed up in one of a hundred or so blogrolls I checked.
- They were “visible”—in this case, having a Google Page Rank of at least 4 in either early fall 2008 or early summer 2009.

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That final criterion was used deliberately to narrow this study's focus slightly from the 2007-2008 study (which continues to be available, *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008: A Lateral Look*). I'd hoped to get down to 400-450 blogs, making analysis easier and the book shorter. I didn't do quite that well, al-

though the list of 607 blogs from the earlier study did come down to 480 (there are 41 new blogs).

If you're wondering: Only 50 liblogs were eliminated because of their low visibility. The others were either non-English [19], defunct (that is, no longer viewable in August 2009 and with no clear trail to a new URL or blogname) [15, plus three that now require passwords], or didn't have at least three posts in March-May 2007 or March-May 2008 [37]...or, in three cases, really didn't have any posts that had anything at all to do with libraries.

Chapter by Chapter

If you've read the series of posts on *Walt at Random*—starting December 4, 2009 and ending December 14, 2009—or if you've already ordered the book, you can skip this section: It essentially repeats the posts, without the lists of liblog profiles. (If you've already ordered the book: **Thanks.**)

Chapter 1: But Still They Blog

The first chapter considers what might be happening with liblogs, changes in methodology and inclusion since *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008*, changes in metrics this time around, and a few general comments on the liblogs:

- Their age
- Blogging platform used
- Currency as of September 30, 2009—that is, the most recent post as of that date.

The chapter ends with profiles for “pioneers”—liblogs that began in 2003 or earlier, often under different names. Later chapters include profiles for liblogs first mentioned (in 2009 or year-to-year changes) in that chapter and not already profiled.

Chapter 2: Rivers, Streams and Rivulets

Some blogs are rivers of posts—and if you subscribe to several, you may come to think of them as firehoses. Others, including most liblogs, are streams or rivulets: Writers and groups of writers letting you know when they have something to say that works best as a blog post.

How often do posts appear on a blog?

Until feeds and aggregators became common, that was an important question. If you didn't provide a reasonably steady stream of posts, people wouldn't have reason to come back to your blog or bookmark it. Few posts, few readers. Some people advised trying to do at least one post a day. Others offered less strenuous advice.

These days, when most readers see posts indirectly, a steady stream of posts is only important for certain kinds of blogs. Indeed, too many posts can work against readership, particularly if posts appear to be for the sake of posting.

This chapter considers frequency of posts among the 521 liblogs for 2007, 2008 and 2009—and changes in the overall picture. The next chapter considers changes on a blog-by-blog basis, a somewhat different consideration.

In all, 449 blogs had countable posts in March-May 2007, ranging from one post to 1,161, with a median of 25 posts (roughly two per week). 486 blogs had countable posts in March-May 2008, ranging from one post to 919, with a median of 20 posts. 434 blogs had countable posts in March-May 2009, ranging from one post to 909—with a median of 13, exactly one per week.

There's lots more in the chapter, of course.

Chapter 3: Changes in Frequency

It's clear from Chapter 2 that, on the whole, visible liblogs had considerably fewer posts in 2009 than in 2007, with fewer liblogs having any posts and fewer posts per blog.

But blogs don't all change in the same way. This chapter considers changes in posting frequency on a blog-by-blog basis...

Quite a few libloggers did significantly more blogging in 2008 than in 2007—all of [the top 20%] and part of [the next 20%]. The median blog in Quintile 1 [the top 20%] had 75% more posts. The next year, the median increase was only 50% and, while the entire first quintile included more posts, the change ranged down to barely noticeable (8%). Over the two-year period, the top quintile includes a number of blogs with slightly fewer posts in 2009 than in 2007. Still, there were dozens of blogs with more posts in each successive year.

The second quintile, representing blogs with somewhat better year-to-year records than average, almost exactly matches my “relatively unchanged” definition (+20% to -20%) for 2007-2008, but ranges from tiny increases to losing a quarter of posts for 2008-2009—and, for the two-year period, includes blogs dropping four out of ten posts over two years.

Chapter 4: The Long and Short of Blogs

Last year, it seemed reasonable to suppose that, on the whole, liblogs would have fewer posts but long-

er posts, as Twitter, FriendFeed, Facebook and others replaced many of the uses for very short posts.

If anything, that's even more true in 2009, even as a number of bloggers simply stopped blogging. One new liblog is an extreme case: *In the Library with the Lead Pipe*, a group blog that's essentially an essay magazine done in blog form, with each (reviewed and edited) entry the length of a typical magazine or journal article.

While more of the remaining libloggers seem likely to write essays rather than quick posts, there are still blogs for which a single sentence or two is the norm, including link blogs and some others.

Chapter 4 begins with metrics on overall blog length and how they've changed. The longest blogs seem to get longer every year: While March-May 2007 tops out at 186,467 words, March-May 2008 jumps past the 200K mark (204,517 words) and March-May 2009 finds one blog all the way up to 238,351...noting that it wasn't feasible to measure total length of some blogs. At the same time, the median length declined each year—from 6,216 words in 2007 to 5,536 in 2008 and 3,621 in 2009.

More interesting, however, is post length, even if it's only practical to measure *average* post length. (It would be interesting to measure length distribution within each blog, but also incredibly time-consuming...) Most of this very long chapter is devoted to discussions and tables relating to average words per post and how post length in blogs has changed over the years—and to the largest set of blog profiles in the book, partly because terse blogs (those averaging less than 100 words per post) are profiled along with the essayists.

Chapter 5: Conversations

Is blogging publication or conversation? Yes and sometimes. Blogging is always a form of publishing—but some posts on some blogs become conversations. The conversational function varies heavily from blog to blog, and newer tools—particularly FriendFeed and FaceBook—may have weakened blog conversations, with the odd result that some extended FriendFeed conversations are based on blog posts and might otherwise take place on the blogs.

Some blogs don't have comments, either because the blogger doesn't allow them or because the posts don't attract comments. There are some blogs where I couldn't determine the number of com-

ments—although there are also blogs where I couldn't track length but *could* count comments.

This chapter considers overall comments for each blog during the three-month study periods (March-May 2007, 2008, and 2009)—but also the more interesting metric: conversational intensity or average comments per post. There's an anomalous change in the highest overall comments (dropping from 1,689 in 2007 and 1,219 in 2008 to 581 in 2009), almost certainly the result of one particular blog moving onto the inscrutable (or at least unmeasurable) LJ/SLJ blog platform—I'd call it "blowing a fuse," but that would be a cheap joke. In fact, highest conversational intensity went up sharply in 2008 (from 28.9 to 53.0) and stayed up in 2009 (51.0), although the gap between the highest CI and the second highest CI was huge (second highest: 13.8 comments per post, with four others over 10).

The chapter also includes three-year patterns for changes in conversational intensity. It's hard to draw any overall conclusions, since over the 2007-2009 period, roughly 40% of blogs increased significantly (more than 20%) in conversational intensity while another 40% decreased significantly!

Chapter 6: Standouts and Standards

Before considering patterns of change (how blogs change across multiple metrics), let's look at some standouts and standards: Blogs that are within the same quintile either across all three key metrics (frequency, post length and conversational intensity) or across all three years within a given metric, and are also within the top three quintiles for the metrics in which they show consistency.

This chapter is about *consistency*—falling into the same general population across several metrics. It's not about quality, and no larger conclusions can be drawn. Think of this as a break in the narrative. You'll discover early on that no blog is in the first quintile throughout—although two come close, with consistently top rankings in two of the three years.

Chapter 7: Patterns of Change, 2007-2008

So far, the book has looked at one metric at a time (except for chapter 6) but a blog is more than its individual metrics. This chapter and the next look at patterns—patterns of change from one year to the next. Three elements make up the change pattern for a blog:

- **Change in number of posts:** Were there more posts in 2008 than in 2007, fewer, or about the same number?
- **Change in post length:** Was the average post in a given blog longer in 2008 than in 2007, shorter, or about the same length?
- **Changes in comments per post:** Was the blog more conversational in 2008 than in 2007 (that is, did the average post have more comments), less conversational, or about the same?

Table 7.1 offers a simplified view of these three changes—“simplified” because it breaks blogs down into “More” or “Less” (where no change at all is counted as “More”)—and that overstates the significance of small changes.

For those who read last year’s study, note that there’s one significant change this time around, for both the simplified table and the triplets: I’m leaving out blogs that lack length metrics in either of the two years being compared. That’s never more than 10% of the blogs, and it means the tables can be considerably shorter (24 lines rather than 36 in the case of Tables 7.1 and 8.1) and easier to understand. Since every blog with a length metric has a valid comment metric (even if the comment count is zero), that further simplifies the process. Blogs are omitted if they have no posts in 2007 as usual—but not if they have posts and no comments. (Note that a blog with zero posts in both years would be counted as having “more” conversational intensity in the second year—an example of the problems with straight up-down comparisons.)

That’s the start of the chapter. Most of the chapter deals with triplets—blogs that have increased or decreased more than 20%, and those that haven’t changed all that much. It’s a rich discussion; I won’t attempt to provide a summary here.

Chapter 8: Patterns of Change, 2008-2009

There’s one peculiarity for 2008-2009 that wasn’t present in 2007-2008: Half a dozen blogs that went from no posts to some posts—and are included because they also had posts in 2007. Since moving from nothing to something is an infinite increase, these show up as having significantly more and longer posts with significantly more conversational intensity...

If patterns of change across the landscape were completely random, each of the fully-indented rows (combinations of three metrics

changes) would have roughly 56 blogs and 1,660 posts and show 13% in each percentage column.

None of the eight patterns is close to those figures.

Three outliers are interesting:

- The most common pattern by far is the “discouraged” pattern: Fewer, shorter posts with less conversation. That pattern represents 125 blogs (28%) but only 11% of the posts.
- The next most common patterns are two with fewer posts and more conversation—77 blogs with longer posts and 71 with shorter posts. Combined, those represent a third of the blogs and 28% of the posts.
- The pattern with fewest blogs is the same as for 2007-2008: More posts, but shorter and less conversational. That has 20 of the blogs (4%) and 564 posts (4%).

It’s also interesting that two-thirds of blogs had (slightly) longer posts—and that a solid majority had more conversation.

The chapter also goes through the “better model” of triplets. You’d need to read it and study the tables to gather much meaning.

Chapter 9: Correlations and Averages

A short chapter, and I can’t claim to have found anything startling. It’s much less graphically interesting than the corresponding chapter in the earlier book, as I chose not to prepare scatterplots (they’re fun to do, but I didn’t find them meaningful in these cases). Let’s just say that there are no startling correlations between pairs of metrics.

Chapter 10: Why People Blog—and How Blogs Change

This study includes 521 blogs. What they have in common is that each involves one or more “library people” as defined very loosely—people who have some connection to the library field and write, at least part of the time, about library-related issues.

How do these people blog, and how is that changing? That’s largely what this book is about, on an objective, quantifiable basis. I discuss qualitative areas in *Cites & Insights* from time to time.

Why do these people blog—and how is that changing? There are many reasons for blogging, some more sensible than others. Here’s my quick take on plausible and implausible reasons for starting and maintaining liblogs, followed by some comments from bloggers themselves...

The chapter begins with some reasons I believe people blog—just a few of the many—and continues with material from the July 2009 *Cites & Insights*, followed by new material (some of which appear, in different form, in this issue).

Chapter 11: Stopping and Pausing

Why does a blogger pause (which I'll define as not blogging for at least four months) or stop altogether? I'm certain the most common reason is premature blogging, that is, starting a blog before you really know whether you have much to say. I suspect other reasons are all over the map, with the second largest probably running out of steam or losing interest (or, these days, finding that saying what you have to say is easier and faster on Twitter, FaceBook or FriendFeed).

A number of libloggers stopped between mid-2007 and mid-2008, or at least paused for so long that they don't have any posts—at least 13% of those with enough impact to make it into *But Still They Blog* and probably more than that among the broader liblog population. Some returned; many didn't.

What follows is a sampling of posts on why people have stopped or paused blogging—or, in some cases, the fateful final posts that don't appear intended to be final. Included are some “haven't been blogging much lately” posts.

Chapter 12: The Rest of the Liblogs

This is the point in the book at which I should find profound meaning from these metrics. It's the perfect opportunity for sweeping conclusions—if there were any.

You've seen smaller conclusions throughout the chapters. Yes, a fair number of bloggers have stopped (when has that not been true?). Yes, there seem to be a lot fewer new fairly-high-profile liblogs in 2008 than in previous years. Yes, most bloggers are blogging somewhat less (and very slightly longer).

And yes, some of that can probably be traced to FaceBook, Twitter and FriendFeed, along with the usual reasons—fatigue, changes in life and work, balance, boredom.

Underlying all that, liblogs still offer a broad, varied landscape of people with interesting and worthwhile things to say. Blogging may be dead (if you believe some pundits)...but still they blog.

The remaining liblogs—those that didn't turn up in a previous chapter—aren't “leftovers” by any

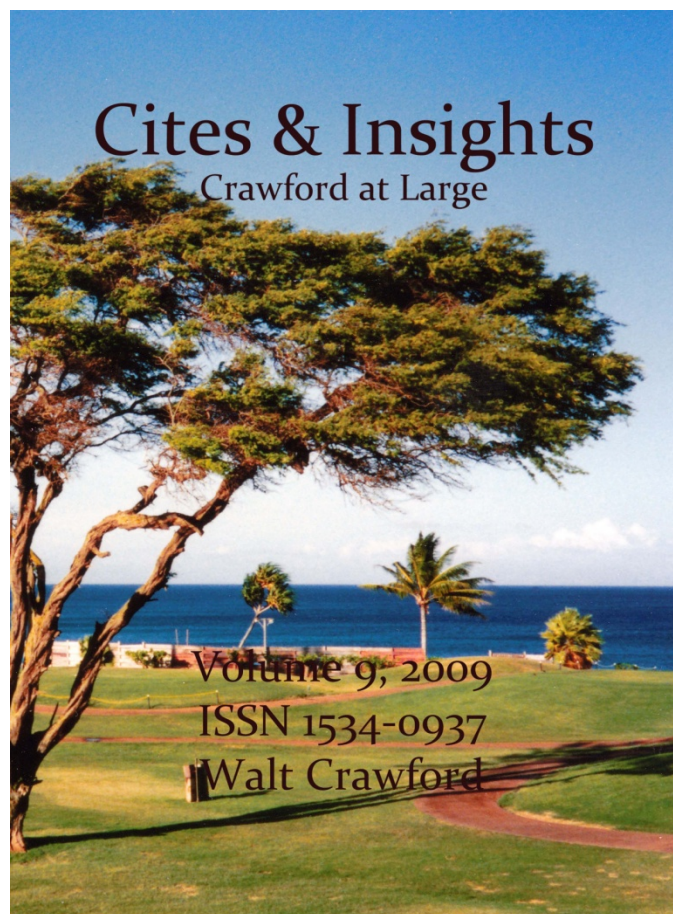
means. A few of these are among my personal favorites, one or two are among those I choose not to comment on so as to avoid snark, several have gone by the wayside—and many just don't have quite enough frequency, long enough posts or enough comments to stand out in a metric (or had metrics problems).

Again: metrics only measure quantity, not quality. You need to judge quality for yourself.

Order Yours Today!

That's it. The book is textually richer than *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008* and, I believe, continues an important study that should be of interest to every library school and many bloggers. It's about as transparent as research can be. The price, particularly through January 18, 2010, is (I believe) unusually reasonable for a 300+-page trade paperback, on proper book stock, representing original research in the field.

Cites & Insights 9 Available as Paperback



Cites & Insights 9 (2009) is now available as a 434-page, 8.5×11, trade paperback, exclusively from Lulu at www.lulu.com/content/7903887/

The volume includes all 13 issues exactly as published (typos and all), except that two book covers in the January issue are in grayscale, not color.

It also includes a contents list showing the articles and pages in each issue, and a volume index.

The price is \$35 for the paperback or \$25 for a PDF download.

The book is printed on bright-white 50lb. paper (my copy looks great!).

As to the cover (a wraparound color photo—you're only seeing the front part here):

Taken by my wife on Molokai, years ago, on the Kaluakakoi golf course running alongside our room at what was then, I believe, a Sheraton at the Ke Nani Kai resort on Molokai's isolated west coast. (The hotel's been closed for some time...tourism on Molokai is an iffy thing.) The only manipulation done to the picture (scanned from a 3×4 print) was to flip it horizontally, so most of the tree would be on the front cover rather than the back. Crappy type position is entirely my responsibility.

Other C&I Book Prices Reduced

C&I 9 was originally priced at \$50 paperback or download, the price set for other book volumes of *Cites & Insights*, set so that sales would actually help support *Cites & Insights* itself. While that was an interesting notion, it hasn't been successful—and I believe the trade-paperback volumes are worth having, at least for library schools and quite possibly for a few readers. So I've reduced the price on Volume 9 and on the other three volumes available as trade paperbacks to \$35 paperback, \$25 PDF.

Admittedly, I produce the books in the first place because I need bound print volumes for later reference, and doing them through Lulu yields a much nicer finished product than doing them at FedEx Kinko's, for not a lot more money. (Let's ignore for the moment the fact that, the next-to-last time I did a Velobound annual at Kinko's, bringing them a ream of bright-white paper to use for the copying, they apparently screwed up and did 80% of the book on the usual cheapest-available copy paper, without telling me.)

Still, they're great ways to have access to the C&I archives. Volumes 6 & 7 even have special features only available in the book version: For Volume 6, a

special preface; for Volume 7, the briefly-available *Cites on a Plane*. For Volume 9, I did something I should have done previously—including a table of contents showing the essays in each issue, reformatted from the online contents page.

I've also reduced the prices on the other two 6x9 trade paperbacks currently available from C&I books (from Lulu and CreateSpace/Amazon; the C&I annuals may also be available via Amazon, although that's less certain to continue). *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts and Continuity and Change* and *The Liblog Landscape 2007-2008: A Lateral Look* are each available for \$25 (plus shipping) trade paperback or \$16 as PDF downloads. You'll find them all at stores.lulu.com/waltcrawford and some of them on Amazon.

Supporting *Cites & Insights*

Since no new sponsor has appeared for *Cites & Insights*, I've restored a PayPal Donate button on the C&I home page. If you find C&I worth enough that you're comfortable paying for it—that is, you think it's worthwhile and paying a little wouldn't deprive you of anything else—you might choose to donate, either via PayPal or credit card (the button opens a secure link).

There's no set amount. I've suggested \$7 or \$8 if you find one particular issue worth paying for, or \$50 (or \$25) if you'd like to support an entire volume of C&I. (You could also buy the PDF or hard-copy versions of the annual volumes, but they've been lowered in price such that they're not really a support mechanism.)

There's also no guilt, threat or pressure. C&I is free. Donations are entirely voluntary.

Making it Work Perspective

Thinking about Blogging 4: Declines and Ends

The next in this occasional series was supposed to be "How we blog"—and there's quite a bit to say on that topic. Consider this episode a detour, taken in part to prepare two chapters for *But Still They Blog*. Part of Chapter 10 and most of Chapter 11 of that book are shorter versions of the first and second parts of this discussion.

Blogging is dead—we've heard that far too many times, including definitive pronouncements

from such never-wrong sources as *Wired Magazine*. If you blog for the right reasons and find it continues to be worthwhile, you may find the *Wired* eulogy heartening: It's strong evidence that blogging really has moved from toy to tool, from Shiny to Useful

Blogging isn't dead or dying, and neither are liblogs in general—but many of them have declined, at least in frequency of posts, and a fair number have ceased or gone missing for extended periods. With apologies for the downbeat nature of parts of this essay, let's look at some of the comments about declines and ends, intermixing personal comments and more general claims.

Blogging in Decline

Begin more than a year ago (blogging's been dying for years now) with Kathryn Greenhill's post on May 18, 2008 at *Librarians matter*: "When should you stop blogging?" She cites a post from *Prologger*, "Should I stop blogging? 20 questions to ask yourself" (www.prologger.net/archives/2008/05/17/should-i-stop-blogging-20-questions-to-ask-yourself/) and lists the questions with her own answers. Before that she offers other notes:

While I don't think I have any intention of stopping *Librarians Matter*, I've noticed my posts are slowing down as I enter my third year. I've been spending more time twittering, on new work projects, blogging elsewhere, getting slowly interested in videoblogging—and even trying to go walking at 6am to spend some one-on-one time with [her 10-year-old son].

My friend Con (Ruminations) has been feeling in a pickle about whether to keep up with her blogging, Morgan (Exploded Library) has recently restarted his blog after a self-imposed hiatus and Fiona (blisspix) has decided to give up her more personal library related blog in favour of continuing a couple of others. I've noticed a huge drop in the number of new posts appearing in my aggregator from librar* blogs.

I find twitter is filling the community/comment space that was once filled reading and commenting on blogs...

Checking those three blogs a year later, *Ruminations* is still strong (but much less frequent in 2008 and 2009 than in 2007), *explodedlibrary.info* is back in 2009—and *blisspix* is indeed gone. *Librarians matter* is doing fine. The drop in the number of posts across the field of liblogs is clear (al-

though not enormous) and may be a good thing. Is Twitter replacing blogs? I'd hope not, at least for serious issues—but it's probably occupying time and energy that might otherwise go into blogging, just as FriendFeed does.

As to the questions? Go directly to either Greenhill's post or the *Prologger* post. Some of the questions are "pro blogging" questions—"Is the blog earning anything?" and "Is the Blog's traffic and income growing or shrinking?"—but others are probably worthwhile, except that they all boil down to "Do I find it worthwhile and have something to contribute, do others find it worthwhile, and do I find it worthwhile enough to take the time?"

Blogs are dead; long live the blog

That's Andrew Keen's thoroughly clichéd title for an April 19, 2009 post at *The great seduction*. For an April 2009 post, it shows a certain lack of historical awareness as he claims "Last year, questioning the future of the iconic weblog would have had me institutionalized." Horsefeathers. But Keen's keen on showing his superior set of friends and inside knowledge. He was in Amsterdam "with a thousand of my closest new media friends" and heard "whispered in the hallways" that the future of blogging isn't promising. One pundit said "Blogging as we know it is dead. It's finished." Another—a WordPress cofounder—had an odd alternative: He thinks blogs will become "aggregation points," "personal hubs" where we store "all our personal media content." **Really?**

Oh, and blogging was "invented" by Keen's "dear Berkeley friend and neighbor Dave Winer" (according to Keen, but certainly not *Wikipedia*) but has been transforming itself ever since. Let's see: Are there more namechecks to help us understand what a bigshot Keen is? Nope, but we get Keen's full answer: Both of these hotshots are right—"The old static blog is indeed dying. But it's being resurrected by Wordpress as a real-time social media personal portal." I can't even parse the first sentence: What on earth is a "static blog"? One that has no posts? As to the second—well, maybe, but in that case isn't it telling that Andrew Keen's blog is a subdomain of typepad.com!

Blogging

Lorcan Dempsey thought about how blogging may be changing in a May 3, 2009 post at *Lorcan Dempsey's weblog*. He sees a distinction between

personal blogs and traditional media in blog form (my wording, not his). Excerpts:

I seem to spend less time looking at blogs, library or otherwise. I don't know if this is just me or if it is a general experience. The demands of work, life and Twitter perhaps. No doubt Walt will inform us in due course whether the volume of library blogging, at least, is up or down, whatever about the quality or interest.

However, as soon as I say that I realise that it is probably not true. I do look at quite a lot of things that are sort of quasi-blogs/quasi-news (e.g. on Cnet) which I do not tend to think of as blogs because they do not have a strong personal voice. I occasionally look at some other things which are clearly 'blogs', if in some managed space. The blogs at HarvardBusiness.org are an example, and they seem a bit flat, as if produced to order.

[He read an ad for an editor of the BBC Internet Blog, very much a corporate blog.]

This prompts me to think that perhaps the word blog has become overburdened and as a result somewhat fuzzy in use. Sometimes we use it for the mechanics, for a mode of delivery which has become a useful and general web publishing medium: a stream of messages which are individually commentable, addressible, and signed, which can be subscribed to as a stream and which can be aggregated and mixed in various ways. Other times we may mean this, but we are principally thinking of the personal voice that comes through ...

So, I probably spend as much or more time looking at blogs in that mechanical sense. But I probably spend less time listening to individual, idiosyncratic voices ...

As a writer and editor for the Library Leadership Network, I use the broadest definition of blogs (Dempsey's is too narrow, since it includes commenting)—but he makes a good point here. I've avoided "mainstream" blogs in almost all cases, those without strong personal voices, but I've left a few of them in my liblog studies. That may be a mistake; maybe we really need to determine separate media even within the library space. (Oh, as for Lorcan's shout-out: Yes, I'm continuing to do that—and yes, the volume of liblog posts is down, although not radically so.)

the halcyon days of blogging are over

That's Morgan Wilson in a May 17, 2009 post at *explodedlibrary.info*. Wilson began reading liblogs almost a decade ago—*librarian.net* and *The shifted librarian*—but didn't know the word. Later, he

learned about it and started his own. Excerpts directly related to blogging:

It was extremely liberating. Some of that was the technology, the blogging software combined with the rise of Google. For the first time, self-publishing was inexpensive, easy and viable as a way of reaching an audience. But it wasn't just the technology, there was the notion that the blog was your own platform, use it to express yourself and say whatever the hell you want to say. After all, most people didn't even know about blogs.

Gradually things changed, more people started blogging and more people started paying attention to bloggers, and things got more serious. But those changes were flowing on from the growth of blogging and were to be expected...

Although I have described blogging as "not difficult," publishing via [Facebook, Twitter, Friend-Feed et al] is extremely easy. Although blogging has become fairly mainstream now, the ease of use factor of Twitter particularly has helped it become way more mainstream.

The difference between an old fashioned blog and somebody's Twitter or Facebook or MySpace page is that a blog is published for the whole world to see, whereas it's possible to control who can access the newer services. This may sound fairly obvious, but I think it's caused a difference in how people use these newer self-publication services...

I wonder, if more and more people can express themselves via Twitter or Facebook, does that mean that over time less people will be interested in starting or continuing blogging?

Guessing the future is always hazardous, because the things which cause the biggest change can never be predicted.

But even if blogging does go into a gradual decline, in terms of its popularity or influence (it's possible that if the mainstream news media continues in its downward spiral, blog posts may gain even more influence), I'm not worried that all of a sudden blogging will become meaningless.

It's interesting to consider the narrative arc of this post, which would be impossible on the other services Wilson mentions. It starts with what appears to be a downbeat statement, a modified version of "blogging is dying"—and winds up with a reasonably positive ending, in line with my own feelings. It's an interesting use of "halcyon" (which I hadn't looked up in a long time)—I believe Wilson means "prosperous" or "golden," not the first meaning in *Webster's Ninth*, "calm, peaceful." (Well, first other than sense 1, relating to the halcyon bird.) I'm

tempted to comment on artificial intelligences having blue-green moods, but that would be silly.

Blogs falling in an empty forest

Not as silly as Douglas Quenqua's June 5, 2009 article in *The New York Times* Fashion & Style section, to be sure. He begins with a 2004 blog, where the first post was an anti-Bush rant that "generated no comments." "The post generated no comments" gets its own paragraph. Oh, and this blogger hasn't been blogging much, but might get back to it.

So? So we get the Technorati 2008 stuff (which I've covered before), the finding that only 5% of the blogs Technorati has identified manage at least one post every four months. "Lots of people start blogs and abandon them"—stop the presses! And when you chat with "retired bloggers," you find that they're disappointed because the world didn't "beat a path to their digital door." Or, alternatively, make them lots of money—the first-quoted inactive blogger hoped to make big bucks through blogging.

If there's an interesting or worthwhile section to this story at all, it's the *opposite* case: a blogger who *did* draw a big audience, but was unnerved by reader reactions and shut it down. That might be worth exploring, but instead we get "audience of one" and the letdown from blogs making everybody famous and wealthy. One is fairly pathetic as an example of how badly blogs are doing: An ad executive who got a big audience, got some ad deals *that influenced his posts*, then didn't get the big ad revenue he was expecting. Such a shame!

Oh, and the blogger who shut down her blog because she didn't like the reactions? She's started a new one that's more impersonal—and she's hoping for a book deal or financial independence.

John Scalzi had a bit of fun with this story in a June 7, 2009 post at *Whatever* entitled "The New York Times: We may slide into irrelevancy but at least we update daily." He notes that the focus on bloggers who quit when they find out it's not a fast road to fame and fortune is "about a decade too late":

I say this is a decade too late because I certainly remember the grouching in 1999 or thenabouts by folks discouraged that no one was beating a path to their virtual doors, and I remember the newspaper stories about just that fact. What's old becomes new again, apparently.

1999 feels early to me, but only by two or three years. On the other hand, I'm with Scalzi in his comment on the abandonment of most blogs:

But again, this is no real surprise; the numbers are larger now but the percentage of abandoned blogs has been fairly consistent for years. The vast majority of blogs, in fact, have nothing but the following three posts:

Post One: "Here's my blog! This is where I'm going to share all my thoughts about life, the universe and everything! It's going to be great and I can't wait to tell you all what I'm thinking about everything!"

Post Two: "Hey, sorry I haven't updated in a while — life's been crazy. But I'll be back soon."

Post Three: "Here's a picture of my cat."

And then it's done.

Scalzi notes that writing on a regular basis is *work*—and he suspects many bloggers "realize fairly quickly that they either don't like sharing all their thoughts to the world, or that their thoughts, while interesting to them, appear fairly banal once they're typed out, and it's better just not to post them for the sake of posting them." It's hard to argue with this statement: **"Most blogs are abandoned because they should be."**

Scalzi finds the *Times* piece "almost endearing[ly] anachronistic," noting that blogs aren't the "hot new kid on the block these days." He thinks most bloggers *should* move to Twitter and Facebook...and, to be sure, notes that most Twitter accounts have very few followers and very few updates.

It's *hard* to make interesting content, whether it's a 670 word blog post or a 140 character tweet. People might initially think they're up to it, but they find out quickly enough that they're not. Which, again, is perfectly fine.

The post has a mere 68 comments, which for *Whatever* is on the low side. I won't attempt to summarize. (Several note that many bloggers aren't out for fame or fortune.) Scalzi calls himself a wordy bastard. I can sympathize.

The long tail of blogging is dying

If the *Times* article is anachronistic, this one's bizarre—it's by Charles Arthur, posted June 14, 2009 at guardian.co.uk, the online arm of *The Guardian*.

Blogging is dying. Actually, no, let me qualify that. The long tail of blogging is dying. I say this with confidence. That confidence is based on two things: my anecdotal, but wide-ranging, analysis of what and how people remark on content from this section, and the surveys carried out by Technorati—which provides the Guardian with the feedback data that appears on our web pages. The interesting question is, what has replaced that blogging?

His anecdotal evidence? His section of the site is *getting fewer pingbacks*. In other words, bloggers aren't talking about *The Guardian's* technology section as much, therefore, they're not blogging. Grandiosity, much? As for his proof from Technorati, since he links to the primary URL, I have no idea what he's talking about; as Scalzi notes, there's nothing new or particularly different about most people abandoning their blogs. The latest Technorati surveys show personal blogs, and blogs in general, as being healthy.

Given Arthur's (misplaced) confidence that most blogs are dying (I can't think of any other way to read "the long tail"), he says he thinks people have "all gone to Facebook, and especially Twitter." (An odd wording, like "everybody's swimming, and especially riding horses," but maybe the Queen's English works differently.) Ooh, ooh, and here's *more proof*: Arthur quotes the *Times* story.

Finally, it all comes down to Arthur's ultimate proof: He has 500 feeds in his reader and feeds "turn brown" when there's no update within 60 days. "More and more of the feeds I follow are turning brown." Is he adding new feeds? Are his feeds in any way typical? Why does this mean anything at all for anybody but Charles Arthur? Because he says so:

People are still reading blogs, and other content. But for the creation of amateur content, their heyday for the wider population has, I think, already passed. The short head of blogging thrives. Its long tail, though, has lapsed into desuetude.

Heyday? Maybe. "Lapsed into desuetude"? Nonsense. If there really are seven million blogs being updated reasonably frequently, that's so far from being either a "short head" or "disuse" (I'm not educated enough to use "desuetude" in my own writing) as to be absurd. Some of the (few) comments get that and a Technorati person cautions against overinterpreting their reports. Hmm. A *Guardian* post gets 18 comments; a Scalzi post gets 68.

The blogosphere 2.0

Laura McKenna (not a liblogger) wrote this July 2, 2009 post at *11d* (www.apt11d.com—those are ones, not els), coming up on her sixth year of blogging and writing about how blogging has changed in the past six years. Excerpts, omitting items that I regard as *wholly* irrelevant to liblogs:

1. The A-List Doesn't Matter Anymore. I just read a really nice paper that came up with a new

method for determining the top 20 bloggers. The problem is that those bloggers aren't nearly as influential as they used to be. Their ranks in Technorati and other lists are artificially high, because they are on the blogrolls of millions of blogs that were begun and quickly abandoned years ago...

Is there an A-list among libloggers? If so, what is it? Do the 20 most widely-subscribed liblogs in 2009 have anywhere near the influence they had in, say, 2006? I don't believe they do—but then, I wouldn't even *dream* of naming the "top 20" liblogs in November 2009.

2. It's all about niche blogs. If you have a particular expertise and unique perspective, then you can quickly gain a following...

Hasn't that been true for a long time—with the caveat that millions of people have unique perspectives on some topic?

3. Norms and practices. Bloggers have undermined the blogosphere. Bloggers do not link to each other as much as they used to... [Fewer blogs link to lots of other blogs.] Many have stopped using blogrolls, which means less love spread around the blogosphere...

OK, so the "blogosphere" is in trouble. That's fine with me, as I never thought the term had any real meaning. There's no "magazineosphere" or "bookosphere," why should there be a blogosphere?

4. Blogger Burn Out. Many of the top bloggers have been absorbed into some other professional enterprise or are burnt. It's a lot of work to blog. Most bloggers, and not just the A-listers, spend 3-5 hours every day blogging. That's hard to maintain, especially since there is no money in this...

"Most bloggers...spend 3-5 hours every day blogging." **Really?** I flat-out don't believe that.

5. Reader burn out. You all are not clicking on the links like you used to. I'm not really sure why. In the past, if I was linked to by a big mega blogger, it meant 10,000 new readers in one afternoon. Now, a link by a mega blogger sends over a couple hundred readers...

Then it hits me: even though *11d's* Google Page Rank is the same as *Walt at Random*, a middling 5, McKenna is a Big Deal: "10,000 new readers in one afternoon." Of course, I don't get links from "mega bloggers," whoever they are...and neither do most libloggers.

8. Twitter and Facebook. I don't really need to explain this one...

So, blogging has changed a lot in the past six years. It's still an excellent medium for self-

expression and professional networking, but it will no longer make mega-stars. It's actually a good thing that the hoopla has died down. No one should spend that much time in front of a computer. The expectations were unrealistic. Use your blogs to target particular audiences and have a clear mission, and you'll get a following...

Or, for many of us, *don't look for "a following."* Write because you want to write, and you're likely to find an appropriate audience. (The post has seven updates, chock full of namechecks and making it *clear* that McKenna is both an old hand and important—but none of them relevant to liblogs. Comments, at least as far as I read, are all over the place. Hmm. And McKenna claims 500 to 1,000 hits on an average weekday—which is interesting, because she's Important, I'm definitely not, yet *Walt at random* currently averages 4,000 page-views per day (seven days a week). On the other hand, she gets a *lot* more comments.)

Finding the sweet spot

Sarah Faye Cohen thought about Twitter and the extent to which it can undermine blogging in this July 9, 2009 post at *The sheck spot*. She notes some frequent libloggers (although two of the three she names aren't *that* frequent these days), then draws a contrast:

I have never been like these people. I am an occasional blogger. I, like many bloggers, *mean* to blog more often. I have many blog posts I *mean* to share or thoughts on our profession that I share all the time with Andy and other co-workers but rarely do I find time to sit down and get it all out on my computer. And admittedly, I feel guilty about it. Lately, I even ask myself if I should maintain my blog at all. This, in part, is because of Twitter.

She's one of those who didn't get Twitter initially and didn't much care for the required terseness—but she found good uses for it and finds herself in Twitter "more than I ever expected," sometimes asking professional questions and getting fast responses.

Don't get me wrong. I still read many articles, blog posts, and journal articles that are through RSS, references, citations, or referrals. But the point I am making is that my input and my output is shifting. I get information in a new way and I share information in a new way. I tweet an awful lot more than I blog... While I have never felt the need to blog for others, blogging can be a lonely endeavor while Tweeting is an amazingly communal one. Increasingly I find I work well with both. I appreciate the quiet of my blog. I appre-

ciate the opportunity to go back and review what I've said. Even as I've been writing this post, I look back at my blog and realize how long I've been blogging and how much I have thought through things here. But on Twitter, I appreciate the ability to share without the added pressure of annotating and reflecting, or at least doing so very briefly.

So where am I? Where does this leave me in terms of my blog and my media? Thinking about how they intersect and diverge more than before. Certainly thinking about how I can use them effectively and interestingly in teaching. But also realizing the purpose and importance they both have for me. It does not need to be one or the other. There is a sweet spot to be achieved...

Cohen didn't abandon and won't abandon her blog—she's blogging at roughly the same pace in 2009 as she did in 2008, down (but not much) from 2007. I don't think there's much doubt that most of us who don't blog for money are finding a changing mix of social media. In my case, it's still not Twitter—but there's little doubt that things happen on FriendFeed that might otherwise happen on my blog or even in *Cites & Insights*. The last paragraph of the post is, I think, the key to the future of blogging as one of several social media for those who find essays worth writing:

Maybe I will keep the blog after all. I'd forgotten how cathartic it can be. How refreshing. How sweet.

W(h)ither blogging and the library blogosphere?

That's Meredith Farkas, July 22, 2009 on *Information wants to be free*. As usual, she has worthwhile things to say—and as usual, I'm having trouble excerpting the post. Still, I'll try (but, as usual, I recommend the whole post).

I remember the first OCLC Blog Salon at ALA very fondly. It was like fangirl overload for me... There was such a great energy in the room — most of the people there had just started their blogs in the past year or two and were just discovering the community that the library blogosphere creates. Most of us had no idea when we started our blogs that these individual media would connect us to other like-minded individuals, giving us not only an outlet for our thoughts, but a distributed space in which to converse and (to an extent) socialize.

Just like previous years, there was a blog salon at this ALA Annual, but when I think about the ones I attended in 2005 and 2007, this event seems to pale in comparison. And I feel like it is symbolic

of what's happened to blogging in general. And I find that depressing.

Ah, Meredith, you didn't attend ALA Midwinter 2009. *That* was a depressing blog salon—too few people in too big a room. Summer was lighter than some past years, but I didn't find it depressing. (And I really don't miss the earlier salons held in suites, where you could barely hear anyone...loads of energy, but too much for an old fogey like me.) Still...

Microblogging, what have you done to my beloved medium??? I remember joining Twitter reluctantly (since all my friends were there) more than two years ago and thinking that it was a fad that wouldn't last. I mean, who would want to be online most of the day updating what they're doing and reading about the minutiae of other people's lives? What a time suck! Well, apparently a lot of people did, since Twitter and FriendFeed are wildly successful now. I thought, and still think, that microblogging is great for conferences — as a backchannel and to connect people to one another — but I still can't commit to doing it enough to really feel a part of things. And I never would have guessed back then what a deleterious impact microblogging would have on longer-form blogging. With Twitter (and even more easily in FriendFeed) you can have the sort of discussion one might have in the comments of a blog post, nearly in real time. And it's really cool, because you can feel much closer to the people you're conversing with since the conversation is happening so quickly and in a single space that everyone is on equal footing in. But that time element is also the problem. If a discussion went on during the work day and you find it in the evening, it's yesterday's news by then and there is often no point adding to the conversation...

To me, this is a particular disadvantage of Twitter—if you're not there, you're *really* not there, and it doesn't thread conversations. FriendFeed is tough: You *can* catch up, but sometimes you just have to recognize that the parade's gone by and you missed it. Sometimes, that's a good thing.

I used to spend hours a day on my RSS feeds, reading thoughtful blog posts by really, really smart librarians. Now, I can get through my feeds incredibly quickly since there's rarely anything from the people whose blogs I used to love. It feels to me like microblogging is more about being clever than thoughtful. You're only as good as your last quip, and everyone is trying to write something that's poignant, provocative, and/or funny in the smallest number of words possible... It's not a knock on microblogging, but I don't think it

can't replace the longer, more thoughtful posts many of us love to read in the blogosphere.

I don't know that I ever spend *hours* a day, but it's possible. It's certainly the case that there are significantly fewer posts—the universe I'm currently studying is down 20% from 2008 to 2009, after being down 10% from 2007 to 2008, and there are fewer blogs in that universe. I share her concerns about “microblogging” (and dislike the term, a losing battle though that is).

Microblogging isn't a bad thing though. I think it's brought a lot of people even closer together. I can see it when I go into Friend Feed—the connections my friends have to one another, even though some of them haven't even met in the physical world. And it's given people who never blogged before a way to connect. But I actually feel less connected to my online friends than I used to simply because I don't have the time to be there as much as I'd like... [Farkas, with teaching and a new son, find that life gets in the way of FriendFeed and Twitter.] It's great for the people who can be there a lot, but many can't. And that's something that I never saw in the blogosphere because people could be part of the community when it suited them and wouldn't miss a beat. It was easy to catch up if you were on vacation for a few weeks.

I'm wondering what I'll do after our next serious vacation. I'll certainly catch up with blogs and email. Will I simply ignore FriendFeed other than the most recent day? Probably—and that means I'm simply not part of the community for that time.

It really depresses me when I hear from people that blogging is over and when I see some of my favorite bloggers (who are now FriendFeed and/or Twitter devotees) cut their blogging down significantly to a “wow, I can't believe it's been so long since I've blogged” post every once in a long while. If it weren't for getting pregnant and having a baby, I'd still be posting a lot, so for me, it wasn't microblogging that affected the quantity of posting.

This troubles me as well. Blogging isn't dying, but I do miss posts from some thoughtful people who I believe are busy with Twitter and FriendFeed.

...Maybe this is the way communication is moving and I should just get over it and get on the train. But I really hope that both can exist (and thrive!) side-by-side. I hope people will find a balance between the two. But what I've seen over the past year makes me think that may not be possible and that most people are devoting the majority of their energies to one or the other.

I don't believe it's *most* people. I believe it's a fair number of people.

It's not like everyone has given up blogging or writing thoughtful posts. I still find some great material in my aggregator from some really great library bloggers. Maybe I'm feeling this more because I haven't added enough newer librarianship-related blogs to my aggregator, blogs from people who are still bursting with enthusiasm about this awesome medium...

She ends by asking for suggestions for newer blogs. There were 39 comments (as usual, almost all comments come in the first few days—in this case, 38 in the first three days, one a month later). A couple of people commented on the movement of *comments* to FriendFeed. One took my silver-lining view in a slightly different way: "I think di-hard bloggers will still blog and this shakedown probably means that what's left is higher quality." Near the end of the thread, another said much the same thing: "It seems more like a natural process of separating the wheat from the chaff in the blogosphere is playing out right now with worthwhile and regular writers still shining while others without much to say are falling by the wayside." I'd like to believe that's true...

Another commenter notes that she *finds* blog posts through Twitter (and it's clear that FriendFeed points the way to posts). This person wonders whether there's room for new libloggers and speaks of established bloggers "who have staked their claim"; I'd like to think that, particularly given the number of established bloggers who've cut back, there should be *plenty* of room—but I look at the small number of widely-read liblogs that began in 2008, and I wonder.

Some wondered whether Twitter and FriendFeed are really to blame, or whether there are other reasons for a decline in blogging—and that's almost certainly the case for some people. There's more; as noted, this was a remarkably extensive conversation for a liblog post in 2009. (There were just about as many comments on this post on FriendFeed.)

In addition to lots of comments, this post drew a followup from Rachel Singer Gordon, posted July 25, 2009 at *The liminal librarian* and titled "Meredith is more thoughtful than I." She notes the many comments on Farkas' post and wonders whether that's because Farkas is an "A-list blogger" with "a bajillion readers" or "because she's one of the few people still writing these long, thoughtful blog

posts that she misses, and people want to be part of that conversation?" She also notes that her non-library blog gets a lot more comments than *liminal*—and she's not sure whether that's because she posts more there, because of the topic or because "people who are into that type of blog tend read it directly rather than on Facebook/FriendFeed?" My guess is that "Yes" is a good answer. (The post drew four comments, including mine.)

Blogging after all these years

Michelle McLean posted this at *Connecting librarian* on July 29, 2009, her fourth "blogiversary." She discusses the reasons she blogs, refers to Meredith's and other posts and offers her own slant:

I've been thinking about blogging for a while now. Even considered stopping altogether, but couldn't bring myself to do it. Although I'm not blogging as regularly, I still feel I have something to say and that this is one of the places I can say it.

Some of the reasons I have been blogging less, are that I am twittering more (most days and for most of the day usually) and I have been more writing away from the online, in the form of conference papers and articles...

I'm feeling less pressure to blog too, probably because of my increased presence on Twitter and Facebook—now I try to blog at least once a month, if not once a fortnight, but only when I have something to say, not just for the sake of it. Maybe I'm finally maturing as a blogger. :)...

Connecting Librarian was intended to be the centre of my online presence, but it's now one of three main locations you will find me. It's now becoming where I do my deeper thinking, whilst Twitter is where I have more of my interactions and conversations and Facebook is mostly just about connections...

...I too miss the depth of content that comes with blogging and I have noticed a marked decrease in the frequency of blog posts arriving in my RSS reader. On the other hand however, I love the immediacy and the contact that micro-blogging brings...

I think that for now, my centre is Twitter—that's where I spend most of my time in terms of an online presence, but I am not giving up my blog. I still have many things to share and this is the ideal forum for that... Be reassured that there will still be blog posts, in the next year, although maybe not as often as I have in the past. I still want to blog though because I am still learning and discovering and find I still want to share all that I do, whilst "connecting new ideas and technologies with library service."

McLean's blogging less than she used to—but those posts are substantive and worthwhile, and six good posts in a quarter are still six good posts.

Whither blogging?

That's the question posed in this August 4, 2009 post by Jim Till at *Be openly accessible or be obscure* (tillje.wordpress.com). Till notes big changes in two OA-related blogs, with Peter Suber curtailing his blogging at *Open access news* and Dorothea Salo "hanging up the keyboard" at *Caveat lector*. Till, who's specifically interested in open access, finds himself searching FriendFeed and Twitter for OA-related items. He too thinks that the role of blogs may be evolving "because of Twitter and FriendFeed" and notes Farkas' post (and my comment).

Then he discusses a new OA journal—and the fact that he first heard about it via FriendFeed. "This illustrates the advantage of short-form blogging as a means to disseminate news items." Maybe that's right—although, unless you rely on hashtags, Twitter's a tricky case. If all you want to do is point out a new journal, traditional blogging is probably overkill.

But the post really doesn't address the question raised. I don't believe many bloggers are arguing that Twitter and FriendFeed should die or that they can't be useful complements or supplements. But what does that do to blogging itself?

A rejoinder to the blog backlash

Marcus Banks chose to comment on a different aspect of blogging's changing reputation in this October 5, 2009 post at *Marcus' world*. Which is to say, some people still regard blogging as somehow inferior to *real* writing and suggest that blogging leads to too much sharing.

Among the criticisms of blogs are that they are vessels for meaningless public narcissism...There is copious chaff among the wheat of the blogosphere. But I've felt for years now that a thoughtful, introspective blog post is just as powerful as a well-developed personal essay. What is the difference?

One of my favorite books is *The Art of the Personal Essay*. Edited by Phillip Lopate, the book was published in 1995--well before anyone knew the word "blog"--and contains essays going all the way back to ancient days.... And Michel de Montaigne deservedly gets his own section, as he is the most famous personal essayist who ever lived.

de Montaigne died in 1592. The desire for a public accounting of personal business existed well be-

fore the Web... Blogs make the impulse to share easier to achieve, but they didn't create it.

The obvious difference between a blog post and a published essay is that blogs are unvetted by anyone except their authors. Essays must pass both publisher and editorial scrutiny. This means the bar for what counts as a "good" blog should be high. And who's to say what counts as good? That's another problem.

All of these are legitimate questions about blogs, which are still a very new form of writing. But accusing blog platforms of inventing the desire to over-share is spurious...

I'm more sensitive than most, I recognize, because I've now written this blog for close to five years. Some posts are much better than others and most are decent but not great. The best posts I've written been very personal, and this candor has helped others.

Would the writing have been any different if it was printed on paper rather than etched on a screen? I hope not. The writing is what counts, in print or online.

Maybe this isn't appropriate for this section; maybe it belongs in "why we blog." Banks can be very personal in his posts—but also mixes personal and professional in some fascinating ways. His own blog is good evidence for the case he's making, and I believe it to be a strong case.

WHY THE HELL AREN'T YOU RESPONDING TO MY BLOG POST

That's the title, intentionally SHOUTING, of an October 24, 2009 post by Mita Williams at *New jack librarian*. It's partly about commenting (or the lack thereof) and the unpredictability of commenting, and offers Williams' take on why seemingly trivial posts sometimes get more comments than substantive posts, but in giving her take she gets into another area that certainly changes the blogging arena:

We don't need any more information in our lives. For every subject upon which you can throw your attention to, there is so much material available that now you also have to choose which point of view you want to go with it. And we don't need any more entertainment in our lives, either. Most people have a backlog of books to read, movies to watch, TV series to catch up on DVD or PVR, and games that they can't wait to play.

So we really don't need a/nother blog to read.

The 'trivial posts' of the microblogging set, are personal—easy to write, easy to read, and—most

importantly—easy to respond to. When strangers meet, they talk about the weather. When you meet online, you make talk about Kanye or whatever. And over time, you get to know a little bit about each other...

What people need is something that makes them truly happy and that thing is community.

My primary response would be to caution against generalizations. Personally, I *do* get to know people through their blog posts—and I *do* desire thoughtful new perspectives on areas I care about, including points of view I don't necessarily agree with. I hope Williams is wrong—not about the “group hug” nature of much of FriendFeed and Twitter (she's clearly right there), but about the usefulness of less “huggy” media. If she's right, then maybe blogging is dying—and I don't believe that to be the case. (There's only one comment, a 289-word one-paragraph anonymous thing that, although I may agree with much of it, I'd have to class as a rant.)

Other Voices: How Individual Blogs Change

To get more of a sense of how blogging may be changing or declining, let's look at a few posts from a mix of liblogs that seem to have changed recently—or gone into a state of temporary decline. (I'm omitting blogs that have disappeared for long periods; we'll deal with those a bit later.)

Don't just blog there—say something

That's David Fulton in a May 17, 2009 post at *Daveman's blog*, formerly *Daveman's tech tips*:

The first rule of blogging is “have something to say.” For the last two and a half months, I've been thinking about what to say and I've concluded that the purpose of this blog has changed.

Before I started my new job as site manager at Polaris Library Systems, I tried to blog whenever I ran across something that I thought would be useful or interesting to my readers. To find these tidbits, I spent at least half an hour each day doing current awareness activities; reading blogs, newsletters, RSS feeds, listservs, websites, etc. Things move fast in library technology and I felt it was critical to keep up as best I could.

The first two weeks at Polaris were overwhelming.... [Work details omitted.] For those first two weeks at Polaris, I didn't do my current awareness at all. Partly, I didn't need it for what I was doing and, after working intensively with a computer all

day, I just couldn't face one in the evening. As my comfort level with the job has increased, I've gradually been reading my information resources more frequently. But I don't think I'm going to rely on them as a source for my blog posts.

In the past, I found things to blog about as a result of my current awareness activities. Since that's not a big part of my current job, I'm not running into them anymore. So the blog will change. Future postings will not be as frequent as they used to be and will cover other things that I'm interested in, such as folk music, acoustic guitars, books and who knows what else. I think so now, anyway.

This blog had declined substantially—from 27 posts in March-May 2007, to 14 in 2008...to two in 2009, albeit two *essays* rather than 14 or 27 fairly short posts. Fulton changed focus and changed the blog's name. He's still not posting a lot, but when he does post, he has something to say.

A new flight

That was the title of Nicole S. Dettmar's *first* post at *Eagle Dawg Blog* in March 2008. At the time, she had this to say:

The intended purpose of this blog is to be my starting point for the Web 2.0 101 continuing education class for the Medical Library Association, but who knows what direction the field or my studies may take me from here.

I've been blogging off and on since 1996 or so... When I first heard the term ‘blog’ back in those ancient days, I thought it meant a backup log of activity on web servers so I did not consider myself a blogger. I still don't think of myself as a ‘real’ blogger because, for the time being, I don't have practical deep and profound brain things inside my head about the medical library profession since I'm not actually in it yet. I'm full of theory as any new graduate who is considered young by our profession's standards should be, but old enough to keep quiet and observe for now without expounding in public.

Welcome aboard for the ride!

Most “class blogs” die. Some don't. Dettmar, who is now definitely part of the field, has turned this into a solid post on medical library and other topics, averaging ten posts a month this year. She writes with style and clearly adds a worthwhile new voice in a category that doesn't lack for strong personal voices.

Losing librarianship?

One way blogs change is when the blogger's life changes in substantive ways—a new job, a new as-

signment, a new child, a new whatever. Steve Ob-
erg's been doing *Family man librarian* since 2002,
and it's always been as much about family life as it
was about libraries and technology. But in Septem-
ber 2008, he changed positions within a corporate
library—and on December 28 posted this:

Since my job change at the end of September, I've
noticed that my professional interests and reading
habits have shifted quite a bit. In particular I've
noticed that most of the library blogs to which I've
subscribed don't seem as relevant any more. Con-
sequently I've unsubscribed from most of them. I
wonder, am I losing librarianship? I'm proud to be
a librarian, don't get me wrong. And I'm not exact-
ly thrilled about all aspects of corporate life and
the silly pap that I sometimes need to consume as
part of that. But I do really like my new, expanded
role focusing on search and taxonomy, with the
opportunities for learning new things and ex-
panding my horizons. As part of that I'm looking
around for other sources of information in the
blogosphere and elsewhere that will help me keep
well informed and current, and I don't have as
much time for keeping up-to-date with purely li-
brary-related things.

That's the whole post. Activity on the blog
dropped sharply—from 42 posts in March-May
2007 and 75 (!) in March-May 2008 to *seven* in
March-May 2009. In September 2009 he noted
that his group is leaving the corporate library en-
tirely, moving to another part of the corporation.
Effectively, this blog is no longer a liblog.

Here we go! SKJ4ALA is launched

This one's interesting: A distinct change in an estab-
lished blog—and one that may or may not be tem-
porary. Sara Kelly Johns has had *From the inside out*
since January 2006, with relatively infrequent posts
about professional associations and school libra-
rianship. But with this post on October 2, 2009, the
blog gained a new subtitle—"Blog for SKJ4ALA
campaign"—and a distinctly new purpose.

Well, it's public now. I am running for ALA presi-
dent, an opportunity to represent all libraries, li-
brarians, library workers and trustees, using the
resources and tools of ALA to have a *loud* voice.

School Library Journal published an announce-
ment yesterday and I am going to be busy here in
DC at their Leadership Summit, but I will love to
hear from people with their ideas for what ALA
can do for them, how it can make a difference. I
know ALA can.

Thanks to my son Ryan for the new picture! My
baby website is up but more will be added to it
soon. I am hoping that between the blog and the
website, I will hear from a lot of people with ideas
and concerns.

Stay tuned.

Some successful ALA presidential candidates have
launched blogs that ceased at the end of their
presidential or past-presidential year. Some have
shifted their blogs into campaign mode and, if
successful, coverage of their years in office (ALA
president is a *big* job—a later post notes that, if
she wins, she'll retire). Frankly, I can't imagine a
liblogger running for ALA president and *not* con-
verting the blog into primarily a campaign vehicle.

All change

Sometimes a change is terse and maybe a little
mysterious, such as this July 12, 2009 post in *Ian
Snowley's library management blog*:

I'm modifying this blog, to reflect some changing
professional interests. So 'regular readers' please
bear with me whilst I make the changes and try to
work out a design that will accommodate the in-
formation I want to share.

That's it—and, so far, other than one other post on
the same day, we're still bearing with him.

That's just a sampling; there are many reasons
for change, some of which never turn up as posts.

Ending and Pausing

Why does a blogger pause (which I'll define as not
blogging for at least four months) or stop alto-
gether? I'm fairly certain the most common reason
is premature blogging—that is, starting a blog be-
fore you really know whether you have much to
say. I suspect other reasons are all over the map,
with the second largest probably being running
out of steam or losing interest (or, these days, find-
ing that what you have to say is easier and faster on
Twitter, FaceBook or FriendFeed).

A fair number of libloggers stopped over the
last couple of years. What follows is a large sam-
pling of posts on why people have stopped or
paused blogging—or, in some cases, the fateful
final posts that don't appear intended to be final.
Included are some "haven't been blogging *much*
lately" posts.

Info Career Trends on indefinite hiatus

That appeared May 4, 2009 on *Info career trends*, a
blog-based newsletter. Excerpts:

Important announcement: After the May 2009 issue, *Info Career Trends* will be going on hiatus indefinitely.

But why, Rachel?

After putting out bimonthly issues for nearly 9 years, it's time for a break. I'm finding it harder to balance labors of love like *ICT* with family and with paid projects, and need to refocus some of my energies. Read Greg Schwartz' post on priorities about putting his *Uncontrolled Vocabulary* podcast on a similar hiatus; he pretty much says it for me as well...

Rachel Singer Gordon keeps the site and, thus, the archives alive and, for a couple of columns, made sure there were ways to keep getting them. The balance is difficult, particularly for ambitious projects such as *Info career trends* (and *Cites & Insights*, for that matter).

the blog is quiet

Richard Akerman posted this on June 28, 2009 at *Science Library Pad*—and it's not about ending, but about an extended slow period.

The blog is quiet for a number of reasons, including

- * I have moved to using Twitter (@scilib) and FriendFeed a lot more for sharing information
- * I have a new iPhone and as I discussed in my Twitter modes posting, short-posting services like Twitter are a more natural match for using on mobile devices...
- * Reason I can't tell you which will be announced soon

...I recognize that Twitter is a much noisier information channel, full of half-formed thoughts, asides and insider person-to-person conversations. The blog is still the best platform for long-form thoughts.

"Quiet" isn't gone (Akerman had *more* posts in March-May 2009 than March-May 2008), but "gone Twittering/FriendFeeding" is clear enough. As of November 4, 2009, there's only been one (quite substantial) post since this one, in late August—after a fairly steady stream through mid-June.

Blogger's Block

Janie Hermann posted this on June 28, 2009 at *Library garden*—a group blog on which she went quiet for a couple of months. Excerpts:

For the last few months I have been suffering from a writer's block of sorts that has made it impossible for me to write a blog post of any length or substance. I have done other writing, just no blogging so it is a true blogger's block. This has

never happened to me before and I have spent the last few weeks honestly trying to figure out the cause is behind this blockage.

It is not a lack of ideas. I have lots of ideas for posts, they come to me at odd moments and usually when I am nowhere near a computer (or even a piece of paper and pen to jot down a quick outline). Lately, however, when I finally sit down to write a post one of three things seems to happen:

1. I start writing and suddenly I feel as if it has already been said before. What seemed like a brilliant blog post when I thought of it, now feels like it is just rehashing the same conversations that we have been having on libraryland blogs for the last few years...
2. I start writing on a timely topic but I don't have time to finish and by the time I go back to polish it off it is no longer relevant or timely...
3. I start writing and feel like I am writing too much about MPOW and all the awesome things we do here. This is not the intended focus of Library Garden...

There's more to Hermann's post—she describes several pieces of advice on breaking writer's block and uses them as the basis for a good solid post. (And she's been back since.) I'm including this partly because I believe she includes three reasons some blogs disappear: Some people *do* run out of bloggable ideas, some find that their own focus is no longer the blog's focus—and some people do feel, rightly or wrongly, that it's all been said before.

Catching up

That's Steve Lawson in a July 3, 2009 post at *See also...* Portions:

So. I haven't been around here much lately. I'm not sure if you noticed. I'd understand if you didn't. The whole "blog" thing has seemed a bit underwhelming lately, no? *Caveat Lector* is dead and I'm not feeling so hot myself. Or something.

One of the reasons I haven't written much here in the past few months is that I have been working on writing a book... The ego boost from having someone say "would you like to write a book?" doesn't quite make up for the months of inertia, self-doubt, and ever-growing dread as the sound of the deadlines wooshing by starts to drown out the Muse of Library Science whispering in my ear.

I have also been busy fighting off depression. I have been prone to mood swings and so on since I was an adolescent, and the blues have been getting harder for me to shake...

You may be asking yourself (as, indeed, I am asking myself) "why is he telling us this?" And I'm

not sure. I don't think I have ever deleted a post after publishing it, and this could be the first.

But I guess I'm trying to say that even though I have neglected this blog (along with many other things) I'm not quite ready to give up on it. I have things I want to write, some about libraries, some about other things. So this blog may be a bit more personal or a bit more random. I sort of miss the days before Twitter and FriendFeed where blogging and commenting was the primary way to communicate publicly on the web.

And I hope that the things that have kept me away from blogging are turning around...

Writing a book is a *great* reason (reason, not excuse!) for a "blogcation"—and unless you're blogging about the blues, it's hard (and maybe inadvisable) to blog too much when you're down. But also note the penultimate paragraph—Lawson, who uses FriendFeed as effectively as anybody I know, sees something missing there as well. I think. If you don't read *See also...* (why don't you?), Lawson's back with reasonably frequent and usually thought-provoking posts.

Well hello, blog

Frankly, I was never aware that Iris Jastram hadn't been blogging as much in June 2009, but that's what she says in this July 3, 2009 *Pegasus librarian* post.

Popping over here...brought me up against a sobering realization, though: I posted once last month. Once. And that was a post I'd outlined weeks ahead of time. I've had dry spells before, but never like this.

It crossed my mind that maybe I should just put this thing out of its misery, but I don't think I'm ready to follow in CavLec's footsteps yet. So here I am again, and here's a bit of what I've been up to since last I thought much about blogging...

[Summarizing; Busy spring term. Two family marriages and a graduation in one month. And...]

Then I took two weeks off of work to do as much of Nothing At All as I could. In case you missed it, that was TWO WHOLE WEEKS off. In a row. Bliss. During that time, I became a big fan of sitting on the porch with a book, a laptop, and some iced tea....

It's been a weird few months in which many individual good things happened but the whole felt kind of awful. I was tired. I am tired. But I think things are starting to turn around. And while I'm not sure how frequently I'll post or what I'll write about, it's nice to see this space sitting here and waiting for me.

It's true that Jastram had only one post in June, and substantially fewer in March-May 2009 than in previous springs. "Life happens": The only reason you need for a pause in blogging. And in this case it was definitely a pause—the blog's been back to a healthy pace of worthwhile posts beginning in July 2009 and continuing since.

My year long blogcation

Andrew Whitis posted this on July 6, 2009 at *library+instruction+technology*. Excerpts:

For the record, I am not dead. I have been on a blogcation...or maybe that is a blog-sabbatical...or maybe life just got busy and my use of alternate communication channels increased.

I've read a couple of posts over the last few days from other librarians feeling guilty about not tending to their blog as they would like. I didn't intentionally plan on taking a year off. Like most of you, a lot of my communication has dispersed into various social media streams. You know the obvious culprits...Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, FriendFeed, Flickr, and del.icio.us. I did consider abandoning this blog, until I noticed that my site visit stats show that people are still tripping across content. The stats indicate that people are mostly "reading" the posts written about conference sessions. I guess I will keep the blog up for awhile and see if I can get into another posting groove (if only to buck the dead and dying blog trend that not many people are blogging about but lamenting on those other social channels).

In case you are curious, here is what I did during my year long blogcation...

Quick summary: Job interview; ALA Annual; big work project; award; *successful* job interview and new position; sold a house and moved to the new position *with no downtime*; accepted into a mentoring program; applied for a team workshop; purchased a house; rebuilt the new library's website; Midwinter; and more projects and conferences...in other words, a *very* busy year.

I really do plan on getting back into writing mode.

There is a lot more I would like to write about the Learning Spaces & Technology workshop and my experiences from our learning commons project.

Since then? Two posts in July 2009, nothing since. Not clearly "the curse of the **I'm Back** post," but we shall see...

It's like talking to the wall

Mark Lindner on July 13, 2009 at *habitually probing generalist*. Bits & pieces:

Seems I don't have much to say anymore. We've all read of the death of blogging. The move to Friendfeed and Twitter. XYZ.

None of those are entirely true. I have plenty to say and a fair bit to talk about...But there are other things that I have chosen to give my time to.

Summary: Big work projects—and a renewed position. Big life changes. Personal honors.

There are going to be a few changes around here soon. Does that mean I may finally start posting again? I can't really say...

...I like having this space in case I do want to share and get around to doing so. It's nice to know it is here waiting on me.

Perhaps I should note that the July 13 post was on *Off the Mark*; Lindner changed the name (again) a bit later, and explained why. (He swapped tagline and name.) The blog's still not enormously active, but Lindner *does* have things to say; he'll return.

library (mon)day in the life.

This July 27, 2009 post by char booth at *info-mational* is notionally a "day in the life" post but includes booth's thoughts about a decline in posting:

After reading Meridith Farkas' excellent post (*see above*) on the the blogging/tweeting thoughtfulness v. frequency relationship, I was motivated to reflect for a bit on my own recent blog/microblog habits. I have begun to engage more regularly with Twitter (@charbooth) and find that it leads people to my blog posts via alternate routes, and I definitely ascribe to the notion that the relative ease/timeliness of microblogging reduces the amount of insubstantial blog posting I do by taking care of the quick/dirty job of sharing instathoughts/quips/finds. I appreciate the format-based separation it seems to be creating between lengthier and shorter reflection in professional discourse, and I also find that (particularly in the case of trending) Twitter generates a short/long-form feedback loop that is strangely satisfying to follow. Last but not least, Twitter finally achieves what I always wanted my various feed readers, etc. to, of floating interesting items I do and don't already follow to the top of the library blog morass in real time. While I might blog only slightly less because of tweeting, I'm absolutely following the conversation more. For me, all of the above are examples of the "balance" Meridith hopes will develop between these media.

The real reason I post to info-mational less often these days because a) I'm writing so ferociously on other projects, and b) it's that summer zombie (as in half-dead) zone in academic libraries where so

much and so little always seems to be happening at the same time...

No further comment needed.

Twittermonster

So is Twitter the great blog killer? For some people, probably—such as Tara Murray, who posted this on July 29, 2009 at *DIY Librarian*:

Six months ago, I tentatively signed up for a Twitter account and started posting a few things. I figured I'd use it occasionally during conferences but that would be it.

Well. This blog has been silent for nearly two months, and I think Twitter is at least partly to blame. I keep posting to Twitter about things I'd like to write blog posts about later...and then I just never seem to get to the blog posts. I'm also not reading as many other blogs—but I am reading a lot of librarians' posts on Facebook and Twitter.

Rather than get all apologetic, I decided to add a Twitter widget to my blog sidebar. I do intend to continue writing somewhat longer commentary on this blog, but the reality is that most of my current chatter is on Twitter—so please do follow me there.

That post would *almost* fit on Facebook, but not quite. (Personally, I *hate* Twitter widgets because I dislike *any* moving elements on a text page—but aggregators remove that aggravation.) Murray's still blogging now and then—and none of the posts chatter.

A return to blogging?

From 75 in 2007 to 25 in 2008 to 0 in 2009: Those are the March-May post figures for Jennifer Macaulay's *Life as I know it*. This August 1, 2009 post explains why (omitting some detail):

Over the past year, blogging has been a nonexistent priority in my life. The major reason for this is that school wiped me out—sapped me of almost everything that I had to give. Working as a systems librarian full-time and attending library school meant that almost every waking thought that I had was about libraries... Once I finished my schooling and realized that I needed some space, I started looking for ways to take more time for me. Given the amount of time and effort that blogging takes, I decided to let it go. And you know, it did help.

Oddly enough, I have missed blogging—quite a bit. I can't say that I am surprised by this fact. This was always a place where I worked through my own thoughts about library-related issues. When blogging, I found that I paid more attention to things that were happening in the library world. I

thought about them more consciously—and I admit that I cared about them more. Since allowing myself to take a break, I have noticed that I pay less attention to things that are happening in the wider library sphere. I am much more narrowly focused in scope. This isn't bad. It was probably a good thing. I think that I needed to narrow my focus in order to make it through the past year...

I believe that things have leveled out a bit (or I have just become used to how things now are). I'm starting to care more about what is going on in the greater library world. So will I return to blogging? I hope so. I have been thinking about it for the past six months...

Macaulay specifically didn't *promise* to return—and apparently needed a few more months (as of December 13, 2009, this is the most recent post).

brief break from blogging because

Christie Hill's *Libraries build communities* blog is primarily an adjunct to her book—but even topical blogs and bloggers sometimes need breaks, as this August 4, 2009 post notes:

I'm on a brief break from blogging because I just had a wedding and have yet to find my way back to normal life where one reads, writes, blogs, and generally keeps up with colleagues in library land. It has even been hard keeping up with my day job, but oh so glorious to be spending big chunks of energy on the personal (and not the work). My mom tells me that you get to be a bride for a year (really? how weird!), but I don't suppose I'll be gone that long...I agree with Meredith that when we're not here, I miss us.

I'm going to spend the next few weeks dusting off and clearing out my reader in preparation for some kind of comeback...

She's back, sort of, primarily posting reviews of the new book. Doesn't getting married earn you a few months' devotion to something more important than blogging? I'd certainly think so.

the interior

This one's particularly interesting because it's on a *supplemental* blog, *explodedlibrary bunker*, which you'd expect to go quiet for months at a time (as it does). Morgan Wilson muses about flying across Australia over the outback, which is much emptier (and flatter) than America's interior.

I want to make it clear, that the interior of Australia seemed emptier is not a bad thing. Actually, seeing all that emptiness was a profound experience. I wouldn't want it to be any different.

It's been almost 3 months since I met L and my life changed. Sad to say, my blogging and writing has been one of the things which has suffered during this time. But I will not blame that on L, there have been other reasons for this. But in general I only have time for so many big things in my life, it's basically a trinity. Before I didn't have a relationship, so my life basically consisted of work, recreation and blogging. Now things are closer to this: work, relationship, recreation.

It will be interesting during this month when L is away travelling in the USA and Europe. It is an opportunity to reset things, get back into the habit of blogging, so that when she returns, I'll continue blogging—which will probably mean less gaming, which is ok.

I should ask myself why this happened. Blogging is more work than reading or playing computer games, but it's not as draining as work, and I do feel good about it afterwards. I should remember this. Then there have been other disruptive things, such as moving house and different role at work, which have made it difficult for me to blog lately.

One of the characteristics of my blogging is that is that it is prone to prolonged droughts. That said, every so often the conditions are right and I do blog more actively. I am reminded of the dry riverbeds I saw on my flight over central Australia. Most of the time they look quite dead, but when there's rain, they are full of life.

That last paragraph says a lot about the ongoing health of liblogs, in a time of apparent decline. Some people—*most* of those who've maintained liblogs for any length of time—do have things to say that make sense to say in blog form, and while the rivers can run dry, they *do* come back to life.

Auf Wiedersehen, Adieu!

Eva, the "bigeneration librarian," posted this on October 15, 2008:

So here's the scuttlebutt:

I love this blog and writing it has been an amazing experience! But as my lack of posting in the last month and a half points out, my current pursuit of other projects leaves me little time to focus on this blog. So I have decided to give it a rest for a while. I can't say whether I will come back to it at some time in the future, but I will not rule it out:)

So it's pip-pip-cheerio for now, and thank you all for reading!

When life and work get in the way, you can take an unannounced pause—or you can let people know that you may never be back.

Time for a change...The Brewin' Librarian's blog is officially closing up shop.

That's Matt Hamiton on October 3, 2009 at *The brewin' librarian*, and the title almost says it all.

I've been thinking about this for a while, and I've decided it's time to officially close up shop on this particular blog. I've had some personal challenges in my life for the last 6 months that have kept me busy when not working and I've neglected to continue to post. More importantly, I feel that I'm in a much different place in my career and in the library world now than when I started this blog and it's time to acknowledge that shift. I feel like it's almost not fair to those who've subscribed and/or linked to this blog to pretend as if this is a viable project for me still.

However, instead of no longer writing I do in fact plan to begin writing more very soon. So look for a new project to be revealed in the coming weeks that reflects a new perspective and purpose. It may be a team blog, it may take a different form altogether...

There was an earlier post that discussed life changes that had *interfered* with blogging; this post put a formal end to this blog.

Posts moved

Wireless libraries, a topical blog on WLANs, may have outlived its usefulness, and on February 11, 2009, Bill Drew moved all the posts over to his primary blog (*BabyBoomer librarian*) and left a placeholder to prevent the blogspot name from being used by someone else.

Virtual libraries interact update

The final post at *virtual libraries interact* appeared December 30, 2008. In part:

Long time readers of our blog will remember that we started the Virtual Libraries Interact blog back in late 2006 as a sister site to our blog.

Unfortunately due to a number of reasons the Virtual Libraries Interact blog has been languishing for a while and no new posts have been added.

It with some regret, and a tinge of sadness, that we have decided to merge the Virtual Libraries Interact blog into the main blog. Do not worry, all of the content has been imported into the Libraries Interact blog.

Soaked up and squeezed out

Mark Rabnett went missing for a year at *Shelved in the W's*—and the returning post, on June 1, 2009, noted his reasons (family illness, new job), noted his return to writing—and decided it was time to

change blogs. The shift was apparently just the tonic needed, as the new blog (*Gossypiboma*) has seen a *bunch* of substantive, essay-length posts.

I am still alive! (Final blog post)

Jill Stover signed off on October 22, 2008 with this post at *Library marketing – Thinking outside the book*. She'd been missing since February 2008—new job, wedding, more—and eventually came to a realization:

While on my little 'break,' I realized that I couldn't devote the kind of time I need to make this blog good while also giving my best effort to my home and work lives. In the quest for work-life balance, this blog and some related projects had to give. Ultimately, I think this blog served the purpose I had in mind for it. I was able to share some of the things I learned about marketing so that it might help others make their libraries a bit better. The content that is here is still useful, I think...

Permanent hiatus

Short and to the point (you're not *required* to tell people why you're shutting down), from Teri Vogel on *SD Librarian*—the first post since December 31, 2007 and the last post (June 12, 2008):

This blog is no longer being updated. Feel free to unsubscribe from the RSS feed.

reinvention

As noted elsewhere, "I'm back!" posts can be iffy things. *digital.brarian*, formerly 'Brary web diva', went quiet from September 6, 2008 to January 6, 2009 and again from then until this post appeared on July 8, 2009:

Hello subscribers,

I know it's been a while since I last posted anything significant, but my time and energy was focused on my MLIS.

You may have noticed the name of this blog has changed. (formerly 'Brary Web Diva')

I left the URLs and feeds unchanged so as not to break a lot of other weblinks about the various posts.

I plan to do some conference blogging while at ALA, wifi permitting.

Of course, it's only been six months...this may be another pause, not an ending.

del.icio.us and general update

Most of this August 9, 2008 post at *omg tuna is kewl* is about *delicious* and libraries—but it leads off with this fateful paragraph:

[For those of you who have been waiting with bated breath for my next post, as an FYI, I turned

all Luddite and canceled my home internet access. That means I only have my phone for home web access, meaning I won't be typing lengthy posts very much anymore. Since I've been feeling like I have very little to say anyway—writing burnout, I think—I dare say you aren't missing much.]

When it's over, it's over

Sometimes blogs end because the end was planned from the beginning. So, for example, *101 tips for school librarians* (101tips.wordpress.com) posted #101 on April 18, 2008. The project was complete and the blog has remained as a resource.

Alternatively, the venue may change. Beth Galaway's May 18, 2008 post at *Game on: Gaming in libraries* announced that she'd been invited to blog for ALA, and apparently the other contributors to this group blog chose not to carry on. (The ALA blog has since gone dark, at least at the URL provided.)

LibraryChange was an adjunct to *Library 2.0: A guide to participatory library services*—and the supplemental information apparently wasn't needed after April 2007 (the final post, October 27, 2007, actually mentions a book signing).

In the case of *Library 2.0: an academic's perspective*, the blogger (Laura B. Cohen) retired and so did the blog. It began as an experiment; it ended (but remains available as content).

"jess" at *Library Talk* posted "So..." on November 2, 2007, noting that the blog—planned as "a community place for 'library talk'"—never came together as hoped. Given this person's *eight* other blogs, this one went quiet, presumably permanently.

Library Zen by Garrett Hungerford was always primarily an adjunct to his LISZEN searchable repository of library-related blogs. The October 26, 2007 post announced a new LISZEN design, and nothing more has apparently been needed since.

Second Life Research Journal concluded on July 5, 2008 with "Talking, looking, flying, searching," when Margaret Ostrander—who began the blog as part of a library grad school research project—noted the conclusion of the project.

And some just disappear...

There's no reason a blogger *must* tell you they're shutting down temporarily or permanently; in fact, I've tended to prefer *not* announcing lapses (unless there's a specific reason to). So, for example:

- The most recent post at *booktruck.org* appeared January 17, 2008 and offered a brief note and pointer on an article of interest.

- *washtublibrarian's* last post, on March 9, 2008, discussed the blogger's new volunteer work as part of the Project Gutenberg "Distributed Proofreaders" team.
- The final post (to date) on *Travels with the state librarian*—and the only post after January 22, 2008—appeared December 16, 2008 with the title "The yearly post :)" and this text: "I apologize for my posting gaps to any who follow this blog!"
- After a final conference report in June 2007, *Texadata's* complete set of 2008 posts (all the first full week of March 2008) consisted of...four recipes.
- *Slow library* was a group blog with an interesting premise—but after what appeared to be a solid start in November 2006, it simply *stopped* with a September 18, 2007 post, a review of my book *Balanced Libraries*.
- *Christopher Kupec's* weblog shows a brief item on "Overdrive for Mac," dated December 26, 2008, as its most recent post.
- Josh Boyer discussed "revealing libraries"—live streams of library research transactions, if you could deal with privacy issues—in a December 17, 2008 post at *The horseless library*: The first post since August 2008, the last one as of November 5, 2009.
- The February 28, 2008 post on *Data obsessed* discussed a *Slate* piece on public libraries. Nothing since.
- September 26, 2007, *InfoPill*: A post on "push and pull." 27 months and counting...

Conclusions?

Blogs conclude, sometimes quietly, sometimes for stated reasons, sometimes because there's no longer the specific need. For most people who've started liblogs, kept them going for at least six months to a year, and found enough readers and links to attain a moderate Google Page Rank, however, the final word is the title of my new book: *But Still They Blog*.

Interesting & Peculiar Products Choosing the Right Laptop

The August 2009 *PC World* has an interesting feature, "The Laptop Compatibility Quiz: Find your

perfect portable.” It breaks users down into personas: average Joe, corporate raider, jet-setter, student, and gamer. For each persona, the article recommends appropriate criteria and offers a few recommendations. Briefly:

- **Average Joe:** Any Core 2 Duo or Turion X2 Ultra Dual-core CPU should do, along with 3 GB RAM, 13 to 16 inch display, a DVD burner—but they also recommend either discrete graphics or at least a slot for a separate processor. (Really? Am I missing out?) Picks: Gateway UC7807u (under \$800), with the \$800 HP Pavilion dv3 as an alternative.
- **Corporate Raider:** Same CPU recommendations, but they say get 4GB RAM and 64-bit Vista (this was August, remember), a screen with 1366x768 resolution but no need for discrete graphics—and weight between 4 and 5 pounds. They suggest The \$1,400 Lenovo ThinkPad T400.
- **Jet-Setter:** An ultraportable, of course, and once again they say 4GB instead of 3GB. Since it’s an ultraportable, you’re probably not going to see more than a 13.3” 1280x800 pixel screen. It should weigh less than 4 pounds. Recommended: The \$2,057 Lenovo ThinkPad X300.
- **Student:** A netbook, which generally means the Intel Atom with 1GB RAM, barely passable integrated graphics, usually a 1024x600 pixel screen and less than three pounds. Picks: the Asus Eee PC1000HE or 1008HA (around \$400) or, if you have more money, the \$749 HP Pavilion dv2.
- **Gamer:** Xenon Quad Core or *maybe* the fastest Core 2 Duo around; 4GB or more; discrete graphics with at least 512MB of display memory, maybe a double graphics card; ideally a 1920x1200 pixel 17 or 18.4” screen, a Blu-ray drive—and about 15 pounds weight. They suggest the \$4,500 Eurocom D901C Phantom-X or Asus’ \$2,200 W90.

Fixing the Ratings

I probably need to find some general-interest PC magazines in addition to *PC World* (sorry, but I can’t be bothered with the digital remnants of *PC Magazine*) or drop most of this section entirely—but meanwhile, *PC World* has fixed one of the ratings issues that used to drive me crazy. To wit,

price is no longer a factor in calculating PCW Ratings for products. Those ratings will depend on performance, design and features.

That *should* mean that we won’t get photo printers offering “good” output coming out higher than ones offering “superior” output, just because they’re cheaper. As the editor notes, buyers take price into account already; factoring it into the ratings number gives it too much importance.

They’ve also abandoned the “exactly one Best Buy logo per roundup” approach. Now, they’ll put the logo on any product that appears to be a bargain—which could mean none (as in the all-in-one roundup noted elsewhere in this section) or several.

One Terabyte, No Spin

One terabyte hard disks are old news; you can buy them for less than \$100 (at least on Black Friday) and you can buy 2TB disks these days. But these are *old technology*—electromechanical devices with spinning disks and read-write heads: Pretty much like a 78RPM turntable from the turn of the century, albeit a little more modern.

As we all know (based on industry gurus), hard disks disappeared years ago, replaced by solid-state memory. And, according to *PC World* October 2009, you should be able to buy a serious solid-state drive right about now, the OCZ iTB Colossus SSD Drive. It weighs less than a pound (14oz.) and fits into a standard 3.5” drive bay. It should have read speeds up to 250MB/s (that’s megabytes) and write speeds of 220MB/s. The writeup doesn’t say much about total cycles, a bane of solid-state drives used for long periods of time as actual hard disk replacement. There’s one other little issue: It should go for \$2,200. (An even smaller and even faster 1TB solid-state drive goes for \$3,000.)

The Real Cost of Smartphones

Mark Sullivan has an interesting Consumer Watch article in the October 2009 *PC World*: “How Much Does a Smartphone Really Cost?” The magazine tried to figure out total cost of ownership over a two-year contract, including the kind of unlimited talk, text and data plans you’d almost certainly want.

For an iPhone 3GS 16GB, necessarily on AT&T, the two-year total would be \$3,836, or about \$160 per month. Turns out that, for any typical BlackBerry model or a Nokia E71x, the total’s also right around \$3,800 (e.g., \$3,764.75 for the BlackBerry Tour 9630

on Verizon, or \$157 a month). But there are lower-priced options: the Palm Pre on Sprint comes out at \$2,635.75 (\$110/month), largely because Sprint's Simply Everything plan is considerably cheaper than Verizon's and AT&T's unlimited plans.

The Range of Audiophile Equipment

I kvetch about claims for absurdly expensive audio equipment fairly often in MY BACK PAGES—complaining *not* because the prices are so high (what someone else wants to pay for exclusivity, artistic design or just to flaunt their wealth is their business) but because of claims that the prices are justified by actual audible performance differences—and sometimes that anything beneath a certain very high threshold really isn't audiophile quality.

That makes *The Absolute Sound's* Editors' Choice Awards issues somewhat refreshing (even though the magazine's disdain for *any* instrument testing is an ongoing annoyance). The magazine doesn't categorize items in various grades, except for a special super-expensive subcategory; instead, everything must meet one criterion: "Would one of [the full-time editorial staff] buy the product with our own money or recommend that product to a close friend or relative?"

So it's interesting to see the range of prices for gear considered high-end. The most recent Awards roundup was September 2009. Let's see what you can put together:

➤ **Budget System:** PSB Alpha B1 speakers, \$279/pair. (Want more bass? Add a PSB SubSeries 5i for \$549.) Oppo DV-980H CD/DVD/DVD-Audio/SACD player, \$169. (Want LPs? Add the Pro-Ject Debut III for \$349, cartridge included.) NAD C315BEE integrated amplifier, \$349. (For LP, you *might* need to add a Parasound Zphono phono-stage, \$150.) Cables (assuming good-quality "no-name" cables won't work): Transparent Audio The Link interconnect, \$85 for one meter, and Paul Speltz "Anti-Cable" Speaker Cable, \$160 for two 8' cables. **Total:** \$1,042 for CD/SACD/DVD playback with no subwoofer (add \$230 for Blu-ray playback) or \$2,290 with turntable and subwoofer (and bumping receiver to a more powerful unit that's \$100 more).

➤ **Expensive System:** MBL 101 X-tremes, \$250,000/pair. Solution 740 CD player, \$60,000. Clearaudio Statement turntable & arm, \$150,000, plus Clearaudio Goldfinger V2 cartridge, \$10,000. Krell Evolution Two preamp, \$50,000. (Unclear whether you'd also want an Audio Tekne TEA-2000 phono-stage, \$12,000.) Solution 700 amplifiers, \$115,000 each (monoblocks: two required). Cables: TARA Labs Zero Gold interconnect, \$14,900 for one meter, and MIT Oracle MA Speaker Cable, \$49,800 for two 8' cables. **Total:** I can't imagine anyone at this price level who isn't also in love with vinyl, but a CD-only system (note: SACD and DVD-Audio playback *not* supported) would be a mere \$654,700. Adding LP playback brings that up to \$826,700.

I am *absolutely* certain that the \$654,700 system will sound better than the \$1,042 system, to almost anyone who listens to music seriously. If you add the subwoofer to the budget system and maybe notch it up to the more powerful NAD C325BEE (\$449 instead of \$349), bringing the non-LP total up to \$1,691, I suspect a serious music listener could still easily tell the difference—but I'm less certain most of us would be terribly *concerned* about it. Is the high-end system worth 387 times as much (without vinyl) or 361 times as much (with vinyl and, for the cheap system, subwoofer)? Certainly for those who choose it—but it's less clear that, speakers possibly excepted, sound quality could be the primary reason. And, for those of us here on earth, even in the Bay Area you can buy a pretty nice house for the difference. (Admission: My current music system is a \$50 MP3 player and \$40 Sennheiser headphones—which I might upgrade to \$80 Grado SR60i headphones, *also* in the Editors' Choice Awards).

Editors' Choices and Group Reviews

PC World tests point-and-shoot digital cameras in the \$200 range in the July 2009 issue—but "\$200 range" is a broad description. The Best Buy is the \$250 Panasonic Lumix DMC-FS25, a 12-megapixel camera with 5x optical zoom and very good image quality. Second place—also with very good image quality, but shorter battery life—is the Nikon Coolpix L20 at \$130. It offers a mere 10 megapixels (more than enough for most photographers) and

3.6x optical zoom. You can, to be sure, buy two Nikons for the price of one Panasonic (plus \$10). Realistically, this review covers *three* price ranges: \$120–\$130 (four cameras), \$180–\$200 (five cameras), and \$250 (one outlier). (The Nikon sold for \$130 in July; in December 2009, it's going for \$100.)

The August 2009 *PC World* rounds up security suites and comes up with an unexpected Best Buy: G Data Internet Security 2010, cheap (\$30 and \$30 per year), great detection rate, good behavioral detection, fast and eking out a slight lead over Norton Internet Security 2009.

Want freebies? The October 2009 *PC World* evaluates nine free security programs. Avira Anti-Vir Personal and Alwil Avast Antivirus Home Edition both come out with “Superior” performance scores, with the Avira edging out the Alwil. You might also look for Microsoft Security Essentials when it emerges from beta—it was slow but well-designed and effective.

Looking at all-in-one PCs (yes, there are a lot of those these days), the September 2009 *PC World* gives the \$1,149 Lenovo IdeaCentre A600 its top score for units with screens 20 inches or larger; it comes with a 21.5” screen, a 2.13GHz Core 2 Duo CPU, 4GB RAM, one terabyte of storage, a Blu-ray drive and such extras as an HDTV tuner and 2megapixel webcam—but it's a crappy gaming machine. For smaller-screen units, the highest rating goes to Dell's \$944 Studio One 19, with an 18.5” touchscreen, 2.5GHz *Pentium* dual-core (a step down from Core 2 Duo), 4GB RAM, 320GB storage and dual-format DVD burner—“better than a budget all-in-one but not quite high-end either.”

My Back Pages

Apple Apologists

I understand Apple fanbois. OK, maybe “understand” is too strong a word, but I can appreciate fanatical brand loyalty. But when consultants and industry gurus serve as apologists for one company, it's a little out of hand.

The well-read among you may already be thinking “Tim Bjarin” (“Steven Levy” would be another good response, but he's a “journalist” not an industry hotshot). And, indeed, here he is in an October 2009 *PC World* report explaining why it's *wholly appropriate* for Apple to make sure you can't

sync your iTunes library with a Palm Pre, going out of its way to change the iTunes software so it would break the synch. Bjarin: “Apple's ease-of-use is only guaranteed to work within the Apple ecosystem. As soon as you go outside of that, you really do start making things much more difficult for the mainstream consumer.” Which is, of course, why you can't use iTunes on Windows PCs. (What's that? You *can* use iTunes on Windows—in fact, it's almost certainly the case that most iTunes customers use Windows?) In other words, Bjarin is saying it's appropriate for Apple to make it *impossible* to mix and match, no matter how knowledgeable the consumer is—because mainstream consumers might be confused. Wow.

Buying Friends by the Thousands

I received an emailed press release from Nightside Media on December 7, 2009. Honest to FSM or Gaia (as you prefer), I couldn't make this stuff up, although I am obscuring the name of the sad little business:

LONELY THIS CHRISTMAS? YOUR FRIENDS CAN NOW BE BOUGHT

Despite the fact that the Internet has made connecting with people infinitely easier, there will still be millions of lonely souls around the globe this holiday season. But if you were one of the Christmas-forlorn, would you consider buying friends to ease the pain?

If this sounds funny, it may interest you to know that people online are already buying friends in their thousands.

Social media traders [XX] have been selling fans and friends on Facebook for some time now, and despite the fact the service is aimed at businesses who use social media in order to market their products and services to potential clients, they say it will definitely be used by others this holiday season.

“We intended our services for businesses though to our surprise it wasn't just business who took advantage of them.” Said [XX] CEO Leon Hill. “We found that a fair percentage of clients were simply people who wanted to look that much more important in the world of social media.”

According to [XX], the number of people buying friends aren't small either.

“We took tens of thousands of dollars in sales the first two days our Facebook service was operational and we estimate that around ten to fifteen percent of all sales are non-business-related.”

“Not only that but we’ve noticed this number increasing slowly the closer we get to Christmas. It seems there are a lot of lonely folk out there willing to connect with people in any way possible.” Said Hill. “We expect the service will see even more people investing cash in friends this holiday season.”

[XX]’s services have thus far received a mixed response including much controversy such as the recent cease and desist notice the company received from Facebook.

Friends can be purchased in packages starting at 1,000 from the [XX] website at [a URL that I’m not about to repeat here].

Funny? No. Pathetic? Yes. You can certainly buy companionship (the legality of doing so varies from place to place), but buying *friends*? *By the thousands*?

If your motive is “to look that much more important in the world of social media,” that’s tawdry and pathetic. If you have some idea that “friends” such as this will be anything other than annoyed, that’s also pathetic. I do find it interesting that a *press release* for a company mentions a cease & desist order from Facebook. Let’s say I’m not planning to respond...

Addendum: After writing this up, I followed the email’s instructions for removing my name from the PR list—as usual, an unsubscribe message. For every legitimate PR firm, that message yields a link that then says I’m unsubscribed—although sometimes it feels as though there are thousands of such “PR firms” at the same USMail address. In this case, though, the email response was immediately rejected—which is a *really* good indication of the upstanding nature of Nightside Media and its clients.

Disappearing Technologies

I’m never quite sure whether various “top 10” or “trends” lists should go in TRENDS & QUICK TAKES, here—or nowhere at all. But where Faux News is concerned, inclusion in T&QT would imply taking them more seriously than they deserve. The original piece is entitled “Gadget Graveyard: 10 Technologies About to Go Extinct” and appeared on April 15, 2009, just two weeks later than it should have. Maybe these three paragraphs tell you all you need to know:

Each of those marvels [typewriters, Walkmen, long phone cords—*long phone cords*?] was a won-

der of its time. Now each is obsolete, a once-outstanding advancement made laughable when compared to the contact-lens camera or Japan’s soon-to-be feasible moon-walking robot.

We don’t even realize something’s obsolete until we realize we haven’t seen it in a while — a floppy disk stashed in the back of a desk drawer, or an unused videocassette propping up a table.

“These technologies are dying out because a more flexible way of doing things now exists to replace them,” explains Mike Knuepfel, a recent Stanford graduate with a degree in product design. “Bulky CDs are replaced by MP3s and streaming files, newspapers can be read online, you need to carry film for cameras, and a house phone is another thing to worry about. People want to be mobile and flexible.”

The killer sentence comes just before the list itself: “10 technological dinosaurs **that recently went extinct**, or will be before you know it.” (Grammar? Faux News is TV; what’s an extra “be” among friends?) So what do we have? Faux News’ items; a little of the snark comes from Angel Rivera’s April 17, 2009 post about this list and is labeled as such.

➤ **Landline phones:** Goners. After all, most college kids in dorms won’t know how to respond if you “ask to use a landline.” (Heck, *I* wouldn’t know how to respond to that...) Rivera offers a grumble about telemarketers (unlike him, we find that Do Not Call works pretty well) and keeping them bottled up through caller ID. I would also note all the bundles of DSL and landline and, for those of us who ever have power failures that could be widespread enough to affect cell towers, the fact that landline phones don’t need AC. The numbers and projections I’ve seen say that about 12 million U.S. households currently have cell-only service, a number *possibly* projected to rise to 26 million by 2012. That still leaves 78% of all U.S. households with landline service. (Will landline phones eventually disappear? Possibly, but not “before you know it” or in the next few years.)

➤ **Floppy disks:** I’ll give them this one—but when you say old microdiskettes “make great coasters,” you’ve lost me. They’re *terrible* coasters, since they’re nonabsorbent. (I would note that, quite apart from underwhelming capacity, the death of diskettes was

aided considerably by several years of diskette drives so cheaply made that your chances of reading a diskette written *on your own PC* were not very high.)

- **Wristwatches:** Since *we all* have cell phones and iPods and *they're always on*, you never need one and “virtually every appliance in your home” (the writer includes coffeemakers, refrigerators and DVD players) has a clock. (Really? Wow, are we Luddites: *None* of these appliances in our house has a visible clock, although the microwaves and electric range do.) “No one wears a wristwatch anymore, unless he or she grew up with one.” For something that’s extinct, watches sure do seem to be on sale in a lot of stores and advertised frequently—possibly because the concept that “if you don’t use it as a teenager, *it’s dead for everyone*” hasn’t quite taken over. (Rivera uses a pocket watch. Me? A Timex. You know, one of those expensive bling devices you wear just to show how wealthy you are.)
- **VHS tape and VCRs:** They died in 2006; you didn’t get the message? Well...yes, they’re dead as playback mechanisms for new movies, and it’s hard to imagine anyone buying a new VCR as a primary device, but there are quite a few combined DVD/VCR units being advertised, so someone sees a market. We still use an S-VHS VCR (as this is written), because we haven’t gotten around to digital TV and a DVR yet, but this one’s mostly right. Still, even this writeup admits that many people keep VCRs around to show all those home tapes—which means the device counts as *obsolescent*, not the same as *extinct*.
- **Beepers:** One can only hope, but there are still dedicated pagers around, I believe. Never had one and never wanted to have one, so I have no comment.
- **Film cameras:** Obsolescent, yes. Extinct, no, and probably not for several more years, but fundamentally, this one may be right. Kodachrome’s essentially gone (to get those nice bright colors now, you need to boost the saturation on your digital camera) and you rarely see film cameras advertised—but a *lot* of single-use film cameras and 35mm

film still shows up at supermarkets, Target and friends and elsewhere.

- **Typewriters:** Also mostly right. They’re still around—almost entirely electronic these days—but without much future.
- **The Walkman, Discman and MiniDisc.** Mostly right.
- **Dial-up Internet access:** You’d think so. You’d be wrong. The article even says so. Nine percent may not seem like much to some people, but Faux News would *love* to have 9% of Americans viewing the channel! Big parts of rural America just aren’t going to have broadband any time soon and, for people whose only use of the internet is occasional email, who needs anything more?
- **DVDs:** Here we get to the silly season. The writeup says “Facts don’t lie” (a great phrase for this source) and that DVD sales “fell off the proverbial cliff in the first three months of 2009.” And, further, “The fact is that with broadband Internet, you don’t need a disc to watch a movie any more.” Therefore, DVDs *are extinct* or about to be. Except...well, so far, none of the broadband services offer anything close to true HD quality (most don’t even offer DVD quality). The decline for the first half of 2009 was around 13.5% (supposedly), not the 40% cited in the story for the first three months...and DVD *rentals* increased more than 8% during that time. Most estimates are that “physical media” movie sales, including Blu-ray Disc, will stabilize in 2010—there’s simply no reason to believe DVDs will fade away any time soon.

Three of ten correctly reported as (essentially) extinct; three more clearly obsolescent as mass-market items and becoming obsolete; four either seriously overstated or just plain wrong. Good for baseball; awful for business journalism.

If Ten’s Good, Is Twelve Better?

Dave Pollard came up with *twelve* tools “that will soon go the way of fax and CDs” (as reported in an April 19, 2009 post on *OPL Plus*, a blog that has itself gone away, unlike CDs and fax machines). Going to the original (a Salon blog from August 5, 2008), we see that the projection is for things that “will probably disappear within the next generation.” That’s such a long-term projection that it’s hard to ridicule entirely, but let’s see what’s going:

- **Hard drives:** Why will they disappear? Because “the price of bandwidth and the price of storage space in cyberspace” have dropped precipitously—you know, something like the price of hard drives (which is, Dave, where your stuff gets stored “in cyberspace”). Oh, and because Homeland Security’s “scanning our laptops every time we cross borders.” He’s hot for doing all your storage and processing in “cyberplaces.”
- **“Wall of Text” Reports & Documents:** “Generation Millennium is returning to an oral/visual real-time culture.” Among other things, this means we’ll use “written language...only when spoken language is unavailable.” Sure, Dave...so why was this a blog post, not a podcast? (Naturally, books disappear along with all other long text.)
- **“Best Practices”:** Hard to argue with this one—that most “best practices” lack enough context to be useful. Will business books touting best practices disappear within a generation? I doubt it.
- **Email and groupware:** Apparently Pollard’s been preaching the Death of Email for some time, “replaced by simple real-time face-to-face, voice-to-voice and IM technologies.” I’ve never understood why pundits believe the desire for *asynchronous* communication will disappear. Real-time simply isn’t always desirable, even if feasible.
- **Corporate Websites:** Really? What’s going to replace them? According to Pollard, “next-gen blogs by individual employees.” That’s right: *Blogs* are the next big thing!
- **Corporate Intranets:** Basically repeating the previous one.
- **Corporate Libraries and Purchased Content:** I’ll quote verbatim: “The only people who really care about taxonomy and boolean search are librarians, and unfortunately they usually don’t know enough about their employer’s business to know what to do with the esoterica that requires such tools anyway.” So much for special librarians! Oh, and all that proprietary content will be free anyway; that’s inevitable. Right?
- **Cell Phones:** Why? Because Pollard’s “full-screen, full-keyboard laptop” gets him high-speed wireless “anywhere for a small flat

monthly fee” including unlimited phone calls. He’s dissing smart phones as well—not only are blogs the future of corporate websites, *laptops* are the future of telephony! (Where is it, exactly, that you get highspeed universal wireless for a modest monthly fee, and how do they do that without piggybacking on obsolete cell phone systems?)

- **Classrooms:** “There is really nothing that can be done in a classroom that can’t be done using desktop videoconferencing with screensharing, for free.” That’s right: Every K12 classroom and college is going away; after all, socialization is for punks.
- **Meetings:** Now we’re really in the range of utopias, since “with simple virtual presence tools” nobody ever needs meetings again.
- **Job Titles:** Huh? Sure, Generation Millennium “expect to have 12 jobs in their lives on average” and *hate* defined roles—remember, *these are universal characteristics*—and we’re all moving to Peer Production, so titles are obsolete.
- **Offices:** Ah yes. Face-to-face interaction’s useless, meetings are obsolete, the entire world consists of knowledge processing, so of course offices will soon vanish.

Pollard tosses in “everything made by Microsoft” but says “that would be too obvious.” Apparently Pollard thinks civilization is going collapse anyway, so it pays to think of all of this in light of the overarching “we’re all doomed” message. We’re doomed (by 2060 or 2070, he says), and civilization will fall apart, but we’ll do so on a wholly interlinked set of networks. Using laptops and real-time virtual presence. Right. It’s fair to note that the one commenter who generally agreed with Pollard was! given! to !lots! of those...

The Stereo Silly Season Never Ends

What anybody else pays for their art works, fancy cars and high-end stereo equipment is their business. Still, it’s sometimes fun for a mild chuckle and some finger pointing—as in the August 2009 *Stereophile* review of the dCS Scarlatti upsampling SACD/CD player & master clock. It’s a CD player, albeit one that comes in three chassis. The review is by Michael Fremer, who notoriously prefers LP to *any* CD (and who owns a \$100,000 turntable and thinks it’s worth every cent). The player costs

\$33,000—OK, it's really \$32,999. (Really? At that price level, people still play the "999" game?) It's a pretty good player. Fremer still prefers LP—but admits that with this player SACDs (which are only being released by a few smaller record companies, notably not including the inventor of the format) sound just about as good, for a mere 33 big ones.

On the other hand, one can readily go overboard in the other direction, as in an August 2009 *Home Theater* review of the Sherwood RD-7503 A/V Receiver. It's *really cheap*—\$440 for a receiver that can power a 7.1-channel surround sound system. The review title is "Low-Rent Audiophile Mode." The manufacturer says the receiver puts out 100 watts per channel with two channels driven into 6 ohms (not the usual 8 ohms), and apparently doesn't specify an all-channels-driven power mode. Perhaps that's wise: The magazine's lab tests show the receiver putting out all of *five watts* per channel into 8 ohms (seven channels driven) at 0.1 distortion, the normal limit for a reputable power measurement. With two channels driven? 72.1 watts per channel—at 100 watts per channel, distortion is well over 2%. Amazingly, this isn't Sherwood's cheapest receiver—that one costs \$250. To the reviewer, the big plus is that Sherwood includes lossless surround processing through an HDMI connection—but what you save on a \$440 receiver you'll more than spend on the super-efficient speakers you'd need for this receiver to make sense. (Highly efficient *quality* speakers are almost always on the expensive side.)

The reviewer was Mark Fleischmann, who's such an expert that he produces the "annually updated book *Practical Home Theater*." We get more of his expertise in a November 2009 review of the Yamaha neoHD YMC-700 Media Controller. This is another underpowered miracle, yielding 15.7 watts per channel (five channels driven) or a whopping 29 watts with two channels—but that's not the reason I include this review. Nope, that comes in a comment about how people listen to music these days—that is, the extent to which they listen to files rather than discs. Here's how Fleischmann says it: "Another rap against the AVR is that it doesn't accommodate the way more and more people listen to music—that is, in the form of audio files as opposed to spinning discs. Even audiophiles listen to audio files if they're lossless or uncompressed." Sure, but he's talking about this

unit connecting to your computer via Ethernet so it can read those audio files. Which are, in almost all cases, stored on spinning discs. As are audio files on larger iPods and other very-high-capacity players, for that matter.

Then there's vinyl—or, rather, the absolutist attitude of some vinyl-lovers. Take Art Dudley (please!). In his September 2009 column in *Stereophile*, he includes this sentence—and it's his emphasis, not mine: "The Sundazed project, on the other hand, marks the first time in decades that Cohen's early albums have been available on vinyl: *the* playback format for serious listeners." When even Michael Fremer's admitting that he can't tell the difference between SACD and vinyl, and with high-resolution downloads becoming available, this is nonsense of a high order.

Speaking of Art Dudley, his November 2009 *Stereophile* column, "14 Brief Observations About Criticism, or Not Really," is certainly worth reading by anyone who takes people like Dudley seriously. I couldn't begin to critique the entire article. I'll note just one item, Number 8. The first two paragraphs:

First made public in 1990, Godwin's Law is a clause that purports to disqualify any debater, no matter how well informed, who makes reference to Adolf Hitler, Hermann Göring, Joseph Goebbels, Heinrich Himmler, Eva Braun, or Colonel Klink in framing his opponents' arguments.

As you might have guessed, Godwin's Law wasn't really coined as a neutral codicil intended to maintain decorum and keep debates on track. It was developed to protect one point of view in particular: People who would presume to tell others which criteria of audio playback—flat frequency response, dynamic range, bass and treble extension, "soundstaging," or whatever else—should be most important to everyone else, especially to audio critics.

The best response is "WTF?" but let's say a little more. Godwin's Law was an observation (not a "clause") made by Mike Godwin in 1990. To quote directly: "As a Usenet discussion grows longer, the probability of a comparison involving Nazis or Hitler approaches 1." Which, as you can see, certainly directly concerns audiophilia! The "law" doesn't even say "invoking Naziism automatically makes you wrong": Godwin argues against *overuse* of Nazi analogies because they rob *legitimate* use of its impact.

Admittedly, the current use of Godwin's Law is, basically, "as soon as someone uses an analogy

involving Nazis, the discussion is over and the person making the analogy loses.” How *anyone* could relate this to the absurd second paragraph by Dudley is beyond me—particularly since Godwin’s Law acts to allow multiple viewpoints, not to protect a singular viewpoint.

And Neither Does Wired’s Silly Season

Here’s the flipside: “the good enuf rvlutn” in the September 2009 *Wired*. The subtitle “Why lo-fi high tech will rule the world.” The article basically says that *we all* will prefer Flips to higher-res cameras, that *we* (the “all” is implicit) “now favor flexibility over high fidelity”...and that “the crapification of everything” is “really an improvement.” And, of course, Clay Shirky’s on board with “do it crappy but make it convenient.” I won’t offer more of a critique; this should be good enough. It does make me wonder: Why does anybody—much less millions of people—buy brand-name HDTVs, Blu-ray Disc players and other high-quality things, when a cheapo standard-def TV and a VHS player are good enough? The answer, of course, is that *some* is almost never *all*, and that most sensible adults *do* care about quality in some areas, just not all. But that complexity mostly seems to escape the *Wired* editorial folks.

Speaking of “good enough” if your standards are *really* low, there’s Demand Media—which churns out 4,000 videoclips and articles a day to try to grab Google mindshare, paying creators crap wages to turn cheap stuff out fast. *Wired* clearly thinks it’s great. I wonder why they don’t fire all those high-priced writers and just get people to write one-paragraph blurbs for \$1 each? Wouldn’t that be good enough?

Constantia

This item may not belong in MY BACK PAGES, but it’s one way to close out the first issue of the volume—and since it’s entirely about the *print* version of *Cites & Insights*, maybe it makes sense to include it in the section that doesn’t appear in HTML form.

I’ve once again tweaked the Word template for *Cites & Insights*—in a fairly profound way that, thanks to inheritance, really only required one change in the template: Changing the Normal typeface and letting that change flow through other styles.

What’s the change? It’s right up there in the subhead, although that’s no help if you don’t already know about it, probably.

For the last five years—or, actually, one issue shy of five years—I’ve been using Berkeley Oldstyle Book (or Berkeley Book) for body text in *Cites & Insights* (Berkeley Oldstyle for bold, because the Book typeface only includes Roman and italic). It’s one of the great text typefaces, good enough that I was willing to spend real money to license it after ALA Editions used it for *First Have Something to Say*.

Berkeley Book is handsome, readable and efficient. It’s also a book typeface—it’s lighter than most typical text typefaces. That sometimes means that printed copies are a little lighter than one might like; it also seems to result in *C&I* being a little hard to read onscreen in PDF form.

I have to admit that I wasn’t even aware Constantia was on my system—it apparently arrived along with either Windows Vista or Office 2007. (I wonder what new typefaces will arrive with Windows 7 or Office 2010 or 2011?) I’m not sure whether I discovered it when looking for possible typefaces for a genealogy book my wife was working on—or whether *she* discovered it when looking for such typefaces.

After asking *Walt at Random* readers for opinions and looking at the alternatives, I’ve changed *C&I*’s body type to Constantia. It *should* be easier to read onscreen. I find the numbers much more readable. I hope you like it.

Masthead

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