

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large

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Bibs & Blather/New Year's Resolution

No More Guilty Pleasures!

Here's a New Year's resolution you should be able to keep: No more guilty pleasures. "Hah," you say, "so you've stopped watching *Buffy* and *Angel* and *Futurama* and *Enterprise*, and now you expect *us* to stick to high culture as well." Hold on. No, I haven't; no, I don't. I'm not suggesting that you change your viewing, reading or listening habits unless that suits your own needs. What I'm suggesting is that you shouldn't feel guilty about your pleasures. (Unless it gives you pleasure to feel guilty about them.)

I'm indebted to Mick LaSalle, a movie reviewer for the San Francisco *Chronicle*. Last summer in the "pinkie" (the *Chron's* Sunday entertainment listing and review section, printed on pink paper), each movie reviewer was asked to admit to (and discuss) his or her "guilty pleasures." He refused on the basis that he didn't feel guilty about liking the B movies and other "trash" that suits his fancy.

LaSalle is right. If you enjoy a book, a movie, a TV show, a CD, a restaurant—then it has positive features that you respond to. (Again ruling out masochism. That's your business.)

Plan 9 from Outer Space is famously so bad that it's good—for some of us, it's charming to watch something done so ineptly in such an innocent manner. *Attack of the Killer Tomatoes* is a bit different: that's an intentional goof—and one I thoroughly enjoyed. Guilty pleasures? Not at all; just specialized pleasures. My wife and I have seen every episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* since it began, years before the critics recognized its qualities. At the time, that show might have qualified as a guilty pleasure, but I don't believe we ever felt guilty watching it. (The movie was mediocre at best; it wasn't a guilty pleasure for us because we didn't find it pleasurable.) Do you make sure you tape every episode of *Sailor Moon*

and other animé? Not a taste I share, but many people find that style of animation captivating, and that doesn't represent stupidity or childishness.

There's nothing inherently wrong with genre fiction, whether it's my genre (science fiction, some mystery) or your genre (police procedurals, Regency romances, sword-and-sorcery fantasy, bodice rippers?). (There may be something wrong with mainstream fiction at this point, but that's another discussion.) There's nothing wrong with *changing* pleasures: if the music of Bread now makes you cringe but you loved it 20 years ago, that's life. If you prefer really good meat loaf or a great bacon cheeseburger (or a great down-home vegetarian entrée) to dinner at a five-star French restaurant, that's preference (I might join you for the cheeseburger).

Explore beyond your preferences, to be sure, but don't apologize for them. Now, if you just *love* Jerry Springer, you're on your own...

The Big Easy

Which brings us to ALA Midwinter in N'awlins. I was going to write another "Go do something" column—and I trust that each of you spent at least *one* day during the holiday season without turning on your PC—but for those of us in the U.S. (and some in Canada), a natural chance to "go do something" is right around the corner.

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If you used to be in a fraternity and miss those sodden parties, the French Quarter between 11 p.m. and 8 a.m. is a plausible substitute. If you need an excuse to indulge in doughnuts, give them a classy French name, make them square, and sprinkle loads of powdered sugar over them: now you're a proper visitor having your morning beignets.

Visit the ALA exhibits, to be sure. RLG will be there, and you can ask to see the new Eureka I've been working so hard on (lean, clean, and straightforward) along with RLG Cultural Materials, ILL Manager, and Ariel 3. Go to your committee meetings and discussion groups.

But leave time to enjoy the city as well. There's a fine aquarium and good zoo; walking tours of the Quarter can be educational and fascinating. Then there's the food. Not just the big-name spots from the Brennan families, Emeril, and Paul Prudhomme, but corner joints where you get great dirty rice, cheap gumbo, and outrageous po'boys. You can even get decent Vietnamese or Tex-Mex food in the Big Easy, if you've had enough Cajun and Creole.

I'll see a few of you at Kabby's Sports Bar (in the Hilton) Monday 4:30-5:45, maybe a few at the MARS Hot Topics Discussion Group or some LITA meetings, or "around."

A Good Stuff Cluster

RLG Diginews 5:6 and ARL Bimonthly Report 218

Yes, I work for RLG. No, I don't have any stake in *RLG Diginews*—it's produced at Cornell and I have nothing to do with it. I hadn't read it all that often in the past, but lately I'm seeing stuff that goes beyond the "traditional" audience, those concerned with digital preservation. As for ARL—I almost never look at the *ARL Bimonthly Report* but there's no getting around the quality and significance of the article noted below.

RLG Diginews

Most of us haven't thought much about emulation vs. migration as possible paths for digital preservation, particularly where something other than simple text needs to be preserved. With *migration*, digital materials are converted to one of a small number of standard formats when added to a repository; as those formats become obsolete, the materials can be migrated to contemporary equivalents. With *emulation*, the attempt is to replicate the "look and feel" of the original as well as the content—in essence, recreating the original environment (format and underlying software/hardware combination) on a contemporary platform. (Yes, those are sloppy definitions. You can find better.) "Emulation vs. migration: do users care?" by Margaret Hedstrom and Clifford Lampe (University of Michigan), describes a user assessment carried out as part of research into the value of and need for the two approaches.

What caught my eye (and what makes this article wonderful reading outside the core audience) was the digital material involved in the user assessment: "Chuckie Egg," a computer game popular in the United Kingdom in the mid-1980s. It ran on the BBC Micro, a very early microcomputer (described as "of similar vintage to the Apple IIe in the US"). There couldn't have been many BBC Micros in the U.S., and even fewer that would be running today, so the research team assumed that few U.S. university students would have played the game before. They were asked to play the game on a working BBC Micro setup, then on a modern PC—either running an emulated version or a migrated version.

I won't go further in this summary. The article offers one datum, possibly the first empirical test of the two methods, and the authors don't claim conclusive answers. It's fascinating reading (*RLG Diginews* is free: www.rlg.org/preserv/diginews/).

Since each issue arrives as a single clump—29 pages when I printed it out—be sure to go on to Richard Entlich's "FAQ" on Web search engines that search for images and how well they do. It's longer than the Hedstrom & Lampe article and, again, well written and distinctly worth reading. Perhaps not surprisingly, even though Google's image search is still a beta version, it was the standout in the test.

The issue (December 15, 2001) also has a brief interview with RLG's Robin Dale and OCLC's Meg Bellinger on the collaboration of RLG and OCLC in digital archiving initiatives and a few minor items.

ARL Bimonthly Report

You'll find this (#218, October 2001) at www.arl.org/newsltr/218—and the reason it's mentioned here is "Beyond core journals and licenses: the paths to reform scientific publishing," by Jean-Claude Guédon, Université de Montréal. It's fascinating and, in a rather awful sense, stunning. Not that the article's awful—quite the contrary—but he describes a particularly difficult aspect of the academic library situation. "The system of science communication has been reengineered twice to the sole benefit of major, international publishers, with grievous consequences for the public and open spaces of knowledge defended by libraries."

This is about the serials pricing crisis (which Guédon recognizes as going back three decades—or more), the commercialization of scientific journals, and the Big Deal phenomenon, in particular consortial full-text agreements with very large STM publishers. It's also about history, possible (partial) solutions, and some additional proposals to improve an unfortunate situation. I regard this as **essential**

reading for academic librarians and worthwhile for many others. (It's also good writing, fortunately.)

While you're there, pick up "The impact of serial costs on library collections," a brief set of stunning facts related to Guédon's article.

Looking Back at the Future

Forecasts tend to be wrong. We should all know that by now. That's one reason I haven't mentioned as many "what the near future holds" articles as in past years—what's the point? After reading William A. Sherden's excellent book *The Fortune Sellers: The Big Business of Buying and Selling Predictions* (Wiley, 1998), I understand some *other* reasons that forecasts tend to be wrong (in addition to self-serving forecasts of market projection firms and attempts to make the future by asserting what it must "inevitably" be).

Sherden categorizes forecasters (from weather forecasters to futurists-at-large) and demonstrates the essential impossibility of long-range forecasts in each category. In essence, where chaos theory doesn't prevent long-term accuracy, complexity theory does. The bothersome aspect of all this for me—and for Sherden—is that absurdly low rates of successful projection don't seem to matter for Faith Popcorn, Toffler, Gilder and the rest. Once you're known as a hotshot futurist, *it doesn't matter how bad you are*. It doesn't hurt that big names can and do selectively present their records. (Sherden provides convincing evidence that Popcorn's biggest trend, "cocooning," simply never happened.)

January offers a good time to look back at some *short-term* forecasts as well as a few long-term ones, consider one recent "looking ahead" piece from the library press, and see whether an informal group of "trendspotters" has been getting it right.

American Renaissance

Now that I've recommended one book related to futurism, here's another—but I can only recommend it as a bemusing combination of broadly sound forecasts and specifically wrong predictions. The title is *American renaissance: Our life at the turn of the 21st century*, the authors are Marvin Cetron and Owen Davies, and St. Martin's Press published it in 1989. Most of the projections are due right about now—and Cetron claimed to have "an astounding 95 percent success rate in predicting future events." Given that 1989 was near the end of a long trend of doom crying, Cetron could be considered remarkable in forecasting an economically vital and prosperous

nation at the beginning of the new century. But then, what would you expect from someone who's right 95% of the time?

The summation of his discussion appears in Appendix A: "Seventy-three major trends affecting the United States into the twenty-first century." It includes 260 specific predictions for the end of the century. As far as I can tell, 53 of them are right—and, at 20%, that's actually a very good record for eleven-year forecasts. I count 49 of them as mixed and in another 65 cases I don't know enough to make a call (or the forecast can't be judged). That leaves 93 (some 36%) that I consider to be mistaken forecasts: not quite twice as many as those that are clearly on the money. A few of those forecasts:

- "By 2001, nearly all college textbooks and many high school and junior high books will come with computer disks to aid in learning."
- We'll have more leisure time, with 32-hour work weeks and half of us working "flex-time/flexplace" jobs.
- "Modular plastic housing will allow people to move more easily and frequently. People will simply pack up their houses and ship them to new locales."
- "High speed, magnetically levitated trains will allow commutes of up to 500 miles."
- "By 2001, artificial intelligence will be in almost universal use among companies and government agencies..."
- Planes will carry 1,000 passengers (and many of them will be supersonic), the average life of a car will be 22 years, separate lanes for trucks will be enforced.
- "Magazines in the year 2001 will be on floppy disks that allow the reader to interact, play with, and manipulate the information on his or her PC."
- "Conspicuous consumption is passé; it has been replaced by downscaling."
- "By 2001 there will be only three major domestic [air] carriers."
- "By 2000, there will be three major corporations making up the computer hardware industry: IBM, Digital, and Apple."

I'm not saying Cetron was or is a fool. I am saying that a 95 percent correctness claim is absurd for *any* pundit. While his projections were frequently wrong on the specifics, it's one of the best older futurist books I've read on the general trends.

Last Year, This Year, Next Year

The only "next year in PCs" article summary I can locate in *Cites & Insights* is Bill Howard's "2001: The

future is now” from the January 2, 2001 *PC Magazine*. Howard offered one of the most conservative sets of predictions I’ve seen—and did remarkably well. He didn’t think that cell-phone Internet browsing would catch on in the U.S., that Internet appliances would do well, or that we’d see big breakthroughs in ease of use. He did expect PCs to be twice as fast in December as they were in January (a little optimistic, but close enough), a 17" LCD display priced at less than \$1,000 (right), \$99 Palm OS device (yes) and skyrocketing sales (no), personal recorders that handle MP3 and video on a hard disk (yes, sort of). The only place where he was a little too conservative was “Whistler,” Microsoft’s code name for Windows XP. He didn’t think it would be locked down by Labor Day, meaning that holiday PC buyers would get IOUs or stick with Windows 98 or ME. In fact, while retail copies of XP didn’t show up until mid-October, essentially all holiday-season PCs came with XP preloaded.

I didn’t cite “What’s ahead for 2001?” from the January 2001 *Information Today* because I missed it then. It’s a set of projections from 13 “information industry movers and shakers,” and many of the discussions fall into areas where I’m incompetent to judge. Some provided conservative and thoughtful projections, including OCLC’s Jay Jordan. Then there’s Knight Kiplinger, who tells us that “pay-per-read purchasing” will take off for consumers and information professionals. “Whether it’s reading material, music, or movies, pay-per-use will become the dominant consumer-purchasing model.” David Seuss of Northern Light offered deliberately silly forecasts (and said not a word about Google). Chris Sherman anticipated more “visual navigation” of the Web (really?) but also more indexing of the “Invisible Web” (e.g., Google’s PDF indexing). He expected most peer-to-peer networks such as Gnutella to crash and burn along with one or two of the “big eight” search engines. You make the calls.

Library Journal for December 15 includes “2001: Looking Back, Looking Ahead” by five of the editors. They anticipate generally poor budget news for libraries, more progress in initiatives to ease the scholarly journal crisis, the possible return of filtering debates to local venues (where they belong), a possible shift back toward practical instruction in library schools, possible good (that is, pro-library, pro-consumer) news in digital copyright, more “portal” offerings from library automation vendors, more (and more competitive) distance LIS programs, and—in a confusing analysis—foundations being laid by a “more sober” ebook industry that will lead to innovation “and eventually to the realization of the e-book’s potential in the years to follow.” That

last one’s vague enough to be irrefutable: even if the ebook potential turns out to be trivial, it could still be realized—and “years to follow” could be dozens or hundreds.

Tracking the Trendspotters

If I had any sense, I’d stop right here. After all, I’m one of the “experts” in this case and this extra issue comes out two weeks before some of us gather in the Big Easy. But secure in the knowledge that airport security officials will have confiscated sharp objects, I’ll roll right ahead. You can reach the summaries discussed here (and much more) through the LITA Website (www.lita.org). I consider at least half of the participants in each of the Midwinter discussions to be smarter than I am, and at least half to be wiser than I am (not the same thing); when I’m involved, I always learn more than I add to the discussion.

The first big discussion took place at Midwinter 1999; the summary starts out by noting one of the top trends: “You don’t have to pay attention to all the trends.” I would add, “And you’ll drown in information overload if you try.” We arrived at seven “trends worth keeping an eye on” three years ago: Library users will increasingly expect user-focused approaches such as MyLibrary@NCState; librarians can improve electronic resources by evaluative guidance; we need “a human face on the virtual library”; we should co-opt existing technologies outside the library field; isolated scholars need service; authentication and rights management matter; and you need to watch out for submerging technologies—for example, delivery of index and full-text databases should be moving from CD-ROM to Web. My current take? We may have exaggerated the user demand for “MyWhatever” (an open question) and I’m not sure we’re doing that much for isolated scholars (I may be wrong), but most of these are still valid, important trends.

A year later, we arrived at six new trends. Libraries need to work with the Internet, not against it. Librarians need to decide their roles in the world of ubiquitous electronic information. “Convergence” in yet another redefinition matters—patrons using library computers for wider functions, library and museum collections mingling, etc. We need to collaborate beyond libraries. Privacy matters. We can’t ignore ebooks and “the world of e-books is taking shape.” I could argue that the final point was insufficiently skeptical, but otherwise this was another set of issues that still matter.

Last year, I can say “they” rather than “we” as I took my first break from ALA in 27 years. So did others, apparently: with six participants, the Mid-

winter discussion for 2001 was the smallest in the group's history. Five trends were spotted: Ebooks as a murky emerging area that could redefine the meaning of "book"; user demands for speed and convenience even if that means paying; the danger of irrelevance if we "continue to see the world solely through the prism of the library catalog"; the need to "automate the shop floor" of the library; and attempts to "repatriate" the Web such as France's haste with Yahoo.

Here's where I'll get into trouble with my esteemed colleagues. I believe the continued concentration on ebooks is a mistake (and that too many libraries will have collections of Rocket and Soft-book doorstops purchased through grant funds, possibly joined by REB paperweights); that most people aren't willing to pay much for speed and convenience outside their primary work areas—and that those who will don't use (public) libraries anyway; that we damage ourselves by concentrating too heavily on Googling or Amazoning the library. I'm not convinced that the "repatriation" issue has much effect on libraries and librarians. I could be wrong on every one of these.

What will come out of this year's discussion? I may have a summary in the next issue but the authoritative word (or what we all grudgingly agree to!) will appear on the LITA Web site, probably within two or three months of the session.

If you believe in straight-line forecasts, there will be four participants this year (ten in 1999, eight in 2000, six in 2001) and we'll come up with four trends (seven in 1999, six in 2000, five in 2001)—and the whole exercise will end next year. I predict that this particular linear progression won't happen.

Ebooks and Etext

C 2 [Shining?] C

Last October, Anne Beaumont (State Library of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia) pointed me to a series of publications about the "C2C" project—"Creator to Consumer," a deliberate play on B2B and B2C Internet-business models. The set consists of five books (available in print or downloadable-PDF form): a primary work and four supplements. With her assistance, I downloaded and read most of the main work and part of one supplement, including the most relevant portions for libraries and my interest in ebooks.

The main title is *Creator to consumer in a digital age: Australian book production in transition* (Common Ground Publishing, 2001). Print ISBN in Australia is 1-86335-047-0, PDF 1-86335-048-9. I'm told

that R2 Consulting is acting as U.S. agent for these books, but a Google search on the title led me to a Common Ground order form. \$AU30 for the main work, \$AU25 each for the rest, \$AU120 for the whole group (in print, adding \$AU10 per book for ground overseas shipping), or \$AU20 for each work in downloadable PDF form.

The books were assembled by a team of writers. It's an extensive look at a set of possibilities for changing book production in Australia, more extensive than any single work I've seen in the U.S. Australia has a distinct set of issues and possibilities. Much of what's discussed will apply to the U.S.; some will not.

I'm not quite sure what to make of the set. Ms. Beaumont suggested I might find the publications "at least worth skimming," and I read more than 250 pages in all. Most of it is well written and represents new business models (both print on demand and actual ebooks) as complementary to traditional publishing, possibly even supporting traditional publishing. We've already seen cases where ebooks and PoD books have sold well enough to justify a traditional print run.

Then there's Chapter Five, "Creating a Viable E-Text Market." Suddenly we're in manifesto territory. "Transition" and "transitional" keep popping up; we're assured that electronic ink and "polymer based computing devices" will "cause us to change how we think about texts and books"; the "new generation" cliché arrives on the very first page (what I call the "Kids These Days" argument for the coming death of print—you know, Kids These Days *prefer* to read from the screen, despite the lack of any objective evidence to that effect); and the authors are strongly supportive of a move to pay-per-view pricing for textual material. In a passage that may be even more horrifying for a library audience, they discuss *favorably* the idea that ebooks move text "from the domain of the *permanent* to that of the *ephemeral*" (they're quoting Rich Gold of Xerox PARC). A footnote acknowledges that moving to pay-per-view offers the likelihood of "shareholder value and income increase"—in other words, it's assumed that readers (and libraries) will pay *more* in such a model.

After finishing Chapter Five, I was tempted to stop—but earlier chapters had been reasonable enough to make me continue. Oddly enough, Chapter Six flatly negates the premises of Chapter 5: "More books will be printed, not fewer."

The brief closing chapter points up some real problems with the current publishing system (also mentioned in the first chapter)—problems that call for a range of new possibilities. The C2C system may be one such possibility. I find the primary work

significantly damaged by the tone and content of Chapter Five, but that's the way it goes with multi-author works. I didn't read the entire book (skipping chapters 9-11), but on the whole I believe this to be a deep and worthwhile discussion.

I looked at three chapters of *Print and electronic text convergence*, 100 pages out of a book running at least 265 pages. I wasn't impressed with "Printing on electrons," another chapter asserting *the move* from traditional to electronic books. Some facts are wrong (including the statement that Betamax' ability to record movies and other programming from network TV "infringed copyright," a neat authorial reversal of the court rulings). "Some industry experts" are cited as saying that the next 10 to 15 years will see "pbook publishing give way to completely digital display options." It's not a question of coexistence and different devices for different purposes: it's what happens to the book "as it *moves* into the digital medium" (emphasis added). Sigh. Perhaps the most interesting (if questionable) sentence comes at the end: "As it stands, those who have adopted ebooks no longer seem to expect them to mimic pbooks, yet their enjoyment of ebooks has not diminished."

Chapter 7 turns out to be another manifesto from most of the same team that wrote Chapter Five in the primary work, providing more detail on the "enabling technologies" that will let us march forward into Ebookland. Loads of details on laboratory claims and patents; if you're gullible enough to believe all the claims from Xerox PARC (that marketing powerhouse!), MIT, and E Ink, book-quality displays are Just Around the Corner. As they have been since 1975. Which leads to "the inevitable standoff between bibliophiles and technologists, with their irreconcilable views about the future of books and the future of reading." I couldn't make up a phrase quite that classic. It would be difficult to assemble a team of knowledgeable bibliophiles who see *no* role for text on the screen and digital distribution—so if there's an "inevitable standoff," it's clear what side finds the views "irreconcilable." By any traditional standard, I'm a technologist, as are Clifford Lynch and many others who see the future as involving both print books and forms of etext. Isn't this nonsense outmoded in 2001-2002?

Finally—in terms of my partial reading—there's Chapter 9, "The trials of technology," a report on library experiences with ebook appliances. Unfortunately, it's written by the same team as Chapter 7, which assures that interpretations favor ebook supremacy. Much is made of the 50 public libraries in the U.S. that circulate such appliances (almost all of

them grant-funded), not noting the total number of public libraries in the U.S.

"Why are not-for-profit public libraries engaging with a technology that was designed for individuals to buy rather than for communities to use?" In addition to the answers provided (some of which make absurd claims about ebooks, but most of which boil down to "it makes us look cutting-edge"), there's the unstated answer: Because we can get grant money for the appliances.

Despite the clear bias of the writers, reporting is extensive—although we rarely see actual medium-term circulation figures. So, for example, in Toowong, "the ebook readers did go out on loan and were used by *a number* of patrons." What number? Fifty? Three thousand? Forty of them filled out evaluation forms, so that's the lower limit. Consider the responses to Question 3, "Did you read a complete book?" *Just under half* of the respondents replied "yes." In other words, of highly motivated people hot to try out this keen new technology, less than half managed to finish a book. Some who didn't claimed that the two-week loan period was inadequate. Three gave "dislike of the technology" as a reason for not finishing the book. (How many print readers stop reading a book because they don't like the typeface or binding method?) We're told that "the technology has not yet been implemented to allow for books-on-demand down the pipe-line," odd in a chapter that later mentions netLibrary.

One library system "emphasized the speed with which Ebook technology has crept into the book-buyer's marketplace." Really? That same library network expected ebooks to provide "a compact format that is indestructible," a charmingly optimistic take on ebook appliances.

Then there's Glencoe Library in Illinois. Demand for ebook readers has dropped since 1999. A librarian there suggests that "the lowered price for readers has made them more affordable for individuals" (who have steadfastly avoided buying them) and "reading from a screen is not enjoyable for patrons." That seems likely. When they asked readers what reading they would do on an ebook appliance, the most frequently chosen response was "E) not if I can help it." And yet, the take on dropping demand is that "we think many of the people who were very interested in using them have now purchased them." That's possible, and if so, it might make Glencoe the hotbed of ebook appliance ownership. It's worth noting that this chapter (and this book) offer the same sales reporting for ebook appliances as every other outlet I've seen: *no reporting*, because nobody will admit to sales numbers. Notice how that doesn't

happen with innovations such as DVD, where sales figures were touted within months of release?

Take away the revolutionaries and both books offer an enormous amount of reporting and speculation—and even the manifestos contain some good material if you can filter out the nonsense.

Planet eBook: Planet Strawman?

One source of my “too much [ebook] stuff” comment in *Cites & Insights* 2:1 was a slew of pieces printed from Planet eBook (www.planetebook.com, but I’m getting 404s lately). Ted Padova flatly asserts that “most of us will see a near extinction of printed works in our lifetime” in an April 25 piece, followed by three responses to that article. I saw a cluster of articles and speeches by Warren Adler, a reasonably successful novelist. A speech by David Spiselman combined a sales pitch with remarkable market forecasts. And Richard Seltzer offered a piece that asserted that “sooner or later, books and music will be free” because technology “will make it possible to vastly enhance the memory power of the human brain...[so that it] will be able to store and retrieve everything that it sees, reads, or hears.” (I don’t see the causal relationship. If I remember a piece of music, that doesn’t mean the writer of that music should not be rewarded for creating it.)

I printed them out—all ugly sans, of course, with sidebars that sometimes didn’t match the articles. I reread them in print form. And I decided it wasn’t worth taking these articles, or the site, seriously.

If Planet eBook is still there, it’s useful as a referent when people claim, “Nobody says print books are dying.” Ted Padova may be a straw man, but he seems real enough. You know some of the themes: Kids These Days will (or do) prefer the screen to the page. In another couple of years (he says “before 2005”), we’ll have ebook appliances with booklike resolution (he predicts *LED* devices exceeding 400dpi). By 2015, “college graduates will be acquiring *all* academic, professional, and leisure information electronically.” [Emphasis added.] Note that “all”—100% replacement of physical distribution (books, magazines, newspapers, movies, music) with electronic distribution, by 2015.

Spiselman of Cyclopsmedia.com claims the downloadable-ebook market would have \$100 million in sales in 2000 (which should have been verifiable for a May 2001 speech), “grow by 400% in each of the next two years,” reach \$3.1 billion in 2004, and reach \$25 billion by 2008. According to Spiselman’s numbers, there should have been \$400 million in ebook sales last year (excluding appliance hardware and print on demand—he *specifically* says

“downloadable books”) and there should be \$1.6 billion in 2002. I’m guessing the 2001 figure is at least an order of magnitude too high (that is, \$40 million or less). I haven’t checked Cyclopsmedia’s status at this point...

Warren Adler’s cluster, which stretches over four years, is hard to evaluate. His agent avoided giving away electronic rights to his novels; now Adler has built his own online bookstore for electronic versions of those books. He’s convinced this is the wave of the future—and, as he told the PLA Spring Symposium, he believes “The era of the paper book is drawing to a close,” although he says, “Death will be slow” “Maybe ten, maybe twenty years or more, but it is coming and probably faster than we think.” Warren Adler, straw man: he doesn’t exist, but he’s got 24 novels and a couple of movies to his credit.

It’s all quite sad. I think the Padovas and Adlers damage the realistic possibilities for ebooks by making it a matter of Either, not Both. They certainly damage the credibility of ebook folks who tell us that nobody ever suggested (or at least nobody now suggests) that print books will die.

Articles and Reports

Manus, Elizabeth, “The instant book that wasn’t,” *Salon*, October 18, 2001. (www.salon.com)

Here’s an odd story of “ebook” technology (primarily print on demand, but also downloadable PDF) at odds with distribution systems. BookSurge LLC assembled a collection of writings about September 11 from a strong set of contributors and had it ready to sell on October 1. *09/11 8:48 AM: documenting America’s greatest tragedy* was done as a charitable operation, with profits going to the American Red Cross. While BookSurge usually prints strictly on demand, the publisher assumed high demand and stockpiled 10,000 copies of this instabook. The \$15 book got good press coverage.

But Ingram wouldn’t distribute it unless BookSurge went through a small-publisher distributor—and Barnes & Noble (or at least one Manhattan store) wouldn’t order it except through Ingram. Neither would Amazon as a paperback—and Amazon handles production of all PoD books through Ingram’s Lightning Source.

The story is a little more complicated, because BookSurge insisted on tough terms as books go. It’s not clear that distributor intransigence and book chain inflexibility kept this book out of mainstream sales (at least for a while). Read the article and draw your own conclusions—recognizing that, as with many other stories, there may be missing pieces.

Berkman, Edwina, "The Watchdog: New Authors Beware," *eBookWeb*, October 27, 2001. (ebookweb.com).

I've been hard on some eBookWeb contributors. It's only fair to mention gems that appear on the site. Edwina Berkman has eleven published novels (under the name Dana Reed); this may be part of a "Watchdog" column. I hope so!

The message: Authors need to read e-publishing offers carefully—particularly when an ad says "publish any manuscript free." When that's combined with the populist pitch about the "cultural loss" because 90% of book-length manuscripts never get published, there's a good chance you're dealing with a vanity publisher that will yield essentially no sales except to you.

Berkman offers difficult examples and one promising venue. She's not against charging for publishing; she is against unprofessional sites with tricky sales pitches. It's an interesting short read.

Dorner, Jane, "Authors and e-delivery," *Learned Publishing* 15:1 (January 2002), 63-68.

This article is distinctly British and distinctly worth reading. Dorner discusses some traps of electronic delivery for established authors (particularly when contract terms seem to be ignored), the maze of ebook formats and devices, a range of delivery models and other aspects of the ebook scene.

I have to pick one nit. She says "most PC monitors are somewhere between 50 and 80 pixels per inch." I don't know of any PC display currently on the market that offers less than 72 dpi; 50 dpi would be exceptionally coarse resolution for anything except a TV screen. Typical LCD displays for the desktop run 85 dpi to 95 dpi (some notebook screens offer more than 120 dpi). Many CRTs are *capable* of up to 115 dpi but typically used at lower resolutions. I also question some comments in that same paragraph, but she could be right.

Otherwise, this article includes a remarkable amount of useful information, presented in a lively manner, in a few pages. *Learned Information* articles are available on the Web; Google will take you there.

Frost, Gary, "Booke & eBook," *FutureoftheBook.com*, November 14, 2001.

I first mentioned this last August. At the time, Frost was about halfway through adding his commentary on Clifford Lynch's landmark *First Monday* article. It would appear that he's done for now, although the article still ends with (*to be continued*). Expect the occasional spelling problem (but then, I missed a few glitches in the January 2002 issue), some interesting grammar, and some philosophy

that's still over my head. I don't agree with everything Frost says, and much of this 14-page (printed) commentary doesn't work unless you have Lynch's article to refer to, but it's still worth another look.

"Academic libraries take an e-look at e-books," November 30, 2001. www.geocities.com/lbell927/index.htm

The URL shown offers a quick summary of a recent grant-funded project at Spoon River College and Eureka College, two small colleges in Illinois. I'm still not sure what to make of the project and the report, but it's a real-world case study. I do believe that ebook appliances have potential for textbooks and course materials.

The primary report is apparently in a form required by the Illinois State Library. It's cumbersome and repetitive, but that's the format as much as anything. Worth reading as a case study.

Miscellany

- David Dorman's "Technically Speaking" in the January 2002 *American Libraries* includes an interesting update on ebrary—particularly interesting if you've been following "ebook library" models. Ebrary's distinctive idea was to let users browse and read from the screen for free, then charge by the page or the book if you wanted to print or extract material. Now, before full launch, the company's keeping *half* that model: end-users pay for copying and printing, but ebrary expects libraries to cough up an annual license fee as well. Dorman's column states that "the company has 26,000 titles under contract, over 4,000 of which are currently available"—which I read as "ebrary has more than 4,000 titles," given the industry's track record for promises.
- M.J. Rose's December 18, 2001 *Wired News* column points out *good* news on digital book sales in the midst of the carnage among big-name operations. Fictionwise is selling more than 10,000 downloadable texts a month (400% more than last year); Hard Shell Word Factory (one of the originals, using diskettes early on) sells more than 1,000 ebooks a week; and, although it's not equally relevant, the University of Virginia (free) Etext Library sees 8,700 downloads a day. Note that none of these are for dedicated ebook appliances. The one that surprises me and speaks to the love of some readers for portability and multifunction devices comes from Palm digital media: 600 to 1,000 "units" a day from a catalog of some 4,000 titles. Add those up, and there's a

healthy combined business, possibly half a million paid downloads this year. Not a huge chunk of the 1.5 billion print books sold in the U.S. (and these figures are presumably worldwide, as e-business tends to be), but a healthy business for firms that care more about what they're publishing than about instant profits.

- Rose's December 25, 2001 column offers comments from authors, publishers, and other industry folk on the highs and lows of 2001 and wishes for 2002. I agree with Rose that the omissions were particularly interesting: nobody mentioned Tasini, Random House vs. Rosetta-Books, the Sklyarov case, or 2,000 layoffs in e-publishing. You can guess most of the cited disappointments. As for "best news" of 2001, we have Michael Hart noting, "the number of Net users will start heading towards 1 billion" (an irrefutable truth as long as the number of users is greater than one and is growing!); claims of more hypertext publishing; a note that in some fields "ebooks" (digital distribution) succeeded years ago, e.g., law; and a claim that E-ink's "new handheld device" (a prototype) is "truly amazing." The wish lists are all over the place, but I'll close with one from Terry Bain at *Zoe-trope: All-Story Extra*: "What I wish would happen would be more people reading better books. Hell, I wish more people would read anything." There's more; you can link back from the most recent columns at *Wired News*.

A Good Stuff Cluster

Learned Publishing 15:1

Several periodicals—print and online alike—seem to be doing interesting and important *groups* of articles within *Cites & Insight's* broad coverage lately, even when those groups aren't themes. Here's another one: the January 2002 issue of a British journal that's been around quite some time. It's a society (print) publication (ALPSP, go to www.alpsp.org to find out more) that is also available as free, superbly-readable PDF files.

While every article in the issue is probably worthwhile for its intended audience, I'm not part of that core audience. I skipped a couple of articles—and treated one of them separately (see "Ebooks and Etext" this issue). Here are quick notes on the others—which you can get to by the usual means. (Another way of saying: these are PDF printouts, so I don't have URLs handy!)

Peter Fox (University Librarian at Cambridge) offers a guest editorial, "Archiving of electronic pub-

lications—some thoughts on cost." Some of it is specific to British concerns and all the figures are in pounds, but the figures and discussion are both interesting. Does it actually take a full person-day to acquire the first version of an online publication—five times as long as for a print item? The National Library of Australia (source of that information) produces careful, thoughtful analyses, so I wouldn't readily discount that claim.

I'm no great fan of Andrew Odlyzko (the feeling is mutual, as he's derided me and Michael Gorman in print), but "The rapid evolution of scholarly communication" is worth reading, even if I don't buy all of his assertions. I'm amused by his assertion of facts backed by footnotes that lead to—other papers by Andrew Odlyzko. (Can I do that? If, in 1999, I claimed something was true, is it OK for me in 2002 to cite Crawford as a source on that topic?) Read this carefully and skeptically. Decide for yourself whether Web linkages really constitute an acceptable form of peer review, whether scholars really should be engaged in a 'war for the eyeballs' and whether you agree that "concerns about information overload and chaos on the internet are exaggerated."

David Pullinger's "Instant linking—delayed use: setting provider expectations" is charming and excellent. He packs quite a bit into five pages, most of it concerned with necessary conditions for readers to make full use of reference-linking capabilities—that is, the ability to click on a reference in one full-text article to go to the article in the reference. Apparently, some early providers are discouraged by low use; he argues that they should not be. Aimed at suppliers, but definitely worth your time.

Joost G. Kircz' "New practices for electronic publishing 2: New forms of the scientific paper" is also short (six pages) but less charming. Kircz argues that scientific journal articles will—*should*—cease to exist. Not just that journals might lose their aggregating function by becoming electronic-only, but that *articles* aren't the right way to communicate. I'm not sure I understand this article (although it does remind me that I'm not a scientist or a scholar). I am reasonably sure that Kircz would not accept Odlyzko's idea of "refereeing by linking."

Finally—not the last article in the issue, but the last for this discussion—David Goodman of Princeton University Library offers "A year without print at Princeton, and what we plan next." In this case, "without print" refers *entirely* to science journals, where Princeton has deliberately set about canceling print subscriptions to journals available electronically "where the financial advantage is significant, where browsing use is trivial, and where we trust the stability and performance of the publisher."

While I marked a number of passages in this article for possible commentary, I'm not sure that's necessary. It's an excellent article—but anyone considering similar practices or pondering the future of print needs to read Goodman's clear writing *carefully*. Princeton is an unusual institution; there's a lot packed into those three "wheres" above and even more caveats in the rest of the article; and he acknowledges the dangers inherent in this course of action. He also notes that cancelling print subscriptions certainly doesn't mean the death of print; it means distributed printing, "since almost no human reads [articles] on the screen, but rather prints them out and then reads them." Princeton isn't jumping into ebooks as substitutes for printed books: that's a different set of issues.

Do I disagree with Princeton's course of action? Not really—even if I were knowledgeable enough to do so out of more than pure reaction. Although it hasn't always been clear, I've tried to distinguish between books and journals, between journals as aggregations of independent articles and journals that reward browsing and cover-to-cover reading, between journals and magazines—and between the near-certainly that effective reading will continue to rely on the printed word and the manner in which those words get printed. (After all, no letterpress or offset is involved in *Cites & Insights*!) Princeton's librarians appear to understand those distinctions, at least as Goodman portrays the situation.

I suspect this article may be a landmark. I hope it will be one of the benchmarks for making coherent decisions in other libraries. I fear it will be read carelessly and used to make bad decisions elsewhere. If so, you can't blame Princeton or Goodman; there's nothing careless or obscure about his writing, and there's nothing careless about Princeton's decisions.

Product Watch

Two-Pound Projectors

For some time now, the most compact digital projectors have been small enough to fit in a large coat pocket—but now they're light enough as well, if you don't mind a \$2,295 bulge. *PC World* reviews the new Plus Lightware Series V-807 in its December 2001 issue; the unit weighs 2 pounds even and measures 5.6x7x1.8", "about the size of a large paperback." It's a DLP projector running 800x600, lower than today's standard but appropriate for many presentations—that's still the resolution used by most Web surfers. At a rated 700 lumens (and given that such ratings tend to be optimistic), it's best for smaller groups and darkened

rooms. No zoom, minimal inputs and controls—but it's quiet, light, tiny, and reasonably priced.

Predicting Attacks— for a Price

A company called SecurityFocus offers ARISpredictor, "which can covertly prevent cybercrimes before they happen." That's the note in a half-page *PC Magazine* review. ARIS "gathers specific security data from about 7,000 participating companies in 138 countries," then massages it so that you get a view of which worms, viruses, and other meanies seem most likely to strike.

Understand that this service does *not* prevent attacks; it just provides information so that you can do so. Still, how can you resist? Maybe one reason: \$100,000 annual subscription.

Durable Inkjet Printing, Cheap

Last August, I mentioned a combination of Epson inks, printer, and paper that promised near-archival photo printing. Now Epson's extended that technology down to a \$180 printer and reasonably inexpensive ink. A November 27, 2001 *PC Magazine* review offers four dots to the Epson Stylus C80 and DuraBrite inks, "rated for 70 years of light resistance" and including self-sealing valves to keep them working longer. The printer runs up to 2880x720 dpi, has a substantial duty cycle for a cheap inkjet (5000 pages per month), and seems to produce plain-paper printouts that just don't smudge even when left out in the rain. It's even reasonably fast.

Users Make the Product

While there's nothing new about that observation, we—I—tend to forget it from time to time. A November 30 article in *Online Journalism Review* (ojr.usc.edu) offered a reminder: "An audio panacea" by Ben Sullivan. He discusses the \$300 Archos Jukebox Recorder, a battery-operated portable 6GB hard drive-based MP3 player and recorder. But he's not interested in playing back ripped CD tracks—he likes the Archos as a reporter's tool and way to include audio clips in Web reporting.

Far-fetched? Not necessarily. As Sullivan notes, many reporters already record interviews—but it's a pain in the butt to pull sound bites from a cassette recording. All that back-and-forth winding and the mediocre audio quality of typical portable recorders discourage audio clips.

The Archos includes MP3 recording; a reporter can create a compressed audio file in the field.

There's a built-in mike, but Sullivan's probably right in suggesting you use an external microphone for better quality. I may be critical of 128Kb MP3 for music, but it should be *more* than good enough for voice, giving the Archos a hundred-hour capacity.

Once recorded, it's easy to dump the file onto a PC, edit it with inexpensive audio editing software, and FTP it to a Web site.

The article notes that the next step would be auto-transcription using voice recognition software. So far, that's unlikely. The company with the best software is bankrupt, and it's hard to achieve good recognition without training for a particular voice. That will change—not that voice recognition will ever be perfect (I don't believe it will), but in a few years you should be able to get a good rough draft straight from the recording.

Sullivan's article shows ingenuity. Maybe the Archos won't give teeny-tiny MP3 players much competition, but it may be a great reporter's tool.

Dirt-Cheap Name-Brand PCs

Here's the deal: \$599 out the door. You get a Celeron-1000, 128MB RAM, a 20GB hard disk, CD-ROM drive, modem, and a 14"-viewable display. Sound and graphics come from the motherboard; a pair of cheapo speakers is included. If you act now, we'll throw in Windows XP Home Edition, MS Works 6.0, and some other software.

Don't worry about custom configurations. There aren't any. What you see is what you get. Still, it's \$599, it's twice as powerful as my current home system, and you can replace the crappy speakers and undersized monitor.

What's the name brand? Dell—the SmartStep 1000, the only Dell desktop that *can't* be configured. Interesting. Dell doesn't build it, but even so... (How much do thin terminals and Internet appliances cost these days?)

Hard Disks— Bigger and Cheaper

No news here, but the specific product highlighted in *Computer Shopper* 22:1 (January 2002), p. 33, is a shocker. Maxtor DiamondMax D540X fits in a standard PC drive bay, runs at a moderate 5400RPM, and uses an Ultra ATA/133 interface. Suggested retail is \$399.95; Dirt Cheap Drives advertises it in the same issue for \$298. The kicker: the D540X stores 160GB. That's less than \$2 a gigabyte via Dirt Cheap Drives, \$2.50 at full retail. Six of these make a terabyte of storage for less than \$2,000. That's almost disturbing. (On the silly side,

the magazine suggests it can hold "an ear-fatiguing 2,664 hours of CD-quality digital audio." *Computer Shopper* long ago abandoned the "near-" prefix that should accompany such claims for 128K MP3—but then, this monster would hold 300 hours of *uncompressed* CD sound or more than a thousand hours of MP3 ripped at 320K, a compression that probably is indistinguishable from CDs for most listeners.)

The Good Stuff

Lately, I find that "the good stuff"—articles worth reading, sites worth visiting—is proliferating as I focus more on the interesting and less on cheap shots and silliness. Additionally, many cluster commentaries—whether clustered by topic (copyright, filtering, ebooks) or by source (e.g., *Journal of Electronic Publishing* in the previous issue and *Learned Publishing* in this issue) are extensions of the good stuff. A change of name is in order.

Honan, Matthew, "Will microads save online content?" *Online Journalism Review*, posted December 11, 2001. (ojr.usc.edu)

You've probably seen microads but may not know the name. The little text-and-link boxes on the right side of a Google result screen when you search on some words? Those are microads. Apparently, Google developed the idea, calling them AdWords. If you want to advertise something, you can sign up on the spot, "buy a word" for somewhere between \$8 and \$15 per thousand impressions, and go.

Several other similar services have sprung up and they seem to be win-win-win situations. Web users win because microads are like good magazine and newspaper ads—available when we want them but not in our face when we're reading content or going to another site (and, of course, because without revenue or sponsorship, Web sites tend to disappear). Web sites win because the ads are easy to sell and set up and because they don't offend users. The third "win" is the intriguing one: advertisers win because microads seem to have much higher click-through rates (CTR) than banner and (raise those pitchforks!) pop-under ads.

Much higher. Most banner ads have CTRs below 0.5%; one media planner cites an industry average of 0.2% (in other words, for every thousand people who see the ad, two click on it). Google says that AdWord CTRs average more than two percent, and some advertisers admit to double-digit responses.

The article discusses some reasons this may be so and what those reasons say about the Web. Good

microads reach users at the right time—if you’re looking for information on cameras, an ad for film services may be worth investigating. One observer makes an odd analogy, to my mind: “The Web is more like radio than TV.” I’d say that the Web is more like print—newspapers and magazines—than like any time-dependent broadcast medium. Honan suggests that microads are a bit like classified ads.

Apparently microads can work for “content sites” as well as search engines. That makes sense, as long as the ads are sufficiently relevant. I’d rather have a couple of text boxes on the screen than all the big-box banners, slide-out overlays, and other intrusions I see on some commercial sites. I’d be more inclined to contact such advertisers. Wouldn’t you?

This article was the first in a series of “possible ways online content can survive in today’s economy.” The second part appeared December 12: “Emmercials: charming the viewer,” by Dan Richardson. I find it much more troublesome—“emmercials” are e-mailed commercials (in other words, spam) that “explode with light and sound.” Presumably using technologies that absolutely, positively guarantee that all that executable code doesn’t include viruses or worms?

Stevenson, Seth, “Adventures in cheating,” *Slate*, posted December 11, 2001. (slate.msn.com)

He’s not kidding. This is a “shopping” feature with a vengeance: a comparison of online term paper sources “to determine where best to spend your cheating dollar.” He selected papers on topics in history, psychology, and biology, then had the papers graded by University teachers or teaching assistants in those areas.

It’s a charming and reasonably thorough article. As you might expect, the free sites (such as Essays-Free.com) are worth about that much. A Columbia judge commented on a freebie history essay: “If they gave Fs at Columbia, well...Instead, it got a good old ‘Please come see me.’” The bio paper “read less like a term paper than a deranged manifesto.” The psych paper was better, earning a C+ or B-, but lacked analysis and cited only textbooks. Oh, and it used British spelling, which might be a clue to an American professor that something was amiss.

Dozens of sites sell prewritten papers, offering ten times as many papers as the free sites for prices from \$35 to \$63 for these examples. One \$35 history paper earned a B or B+, but the prof said the paper just might set off his “pladar” (plagiarism radar): the writer knew the literature a little *too* well. At another site, a psych paper earned a solid B, as did a bio paper. The third site seemed to sell very

old papers (1978-1983) scanned for sale. Stevenson notes that these papers offer the best course for a “smart but horribly lazy student”—buy a mediocre paper that has the research and spend your time editing. That assumes that the lazy student knows how to write and edit, of course.

Finally, Stevenson tried a custom-written paper; several sites offer this service at \$17 to \$20 per page. He made it a tough assignment: a somewhat nonsensical assignment for a brief paper based on an 1100-page novel with complex footnotes. He needed the paper in a week—which, as he notes, makes it nearly impossible for the writer to actually *read* the book and write a coherent paper. \$72 and a week later, he got back the paper: Tripe, but possibly good enough for a C+. He includes the complete paper—after all, he paid good money for it.

Relevance to libraries? It seems as though some faculty members at some colleges believe that the librarians should run plagiarism-detecting services for them. If you’re going to detect this stuff, it doesn’t hurt to know what you’re up against. (Besides, the article’s a kick.)

Rubenking, Neil J., “Ease into XP,” *PC Magazine* 20:22 (December 26, 2001), pp. 70-2.

If you have no plans to install Windows XP, skip this. Otherwise, it’s a worthwhile set of tips for making the upgrade work better. To summarize: *Run* the Upgrade Advisor (and allow plenty of time); if more than one person uses the PC, consider separate accounts for cleaner desktops (Fast User Switching finally makes this sensible); there are ways to control the usage-based changes in Windows. Although DOS isn’t there any more, XP does a better job of running DOS programs than Windows NT4 or 2000: it’s got many built-in ways to provide compatibility. As is typical with Rubenking, this is an information-dense article.

Yegulalp, Serdar, “Getting the best experience,” *Computer Shopper* 22:1 (January 2002), pp. 138-49.

A useful companion piece to the Rubenking article. This one offers more than forty tips on getting the most out of XP. They’re not all great tips, and certainly not worthwhile for everyone (lots of them boil down to “explore a bit and you shall find”), but still worth a quick look. If your PC is new enough to upgrade, of course.

Lasica, J.D., “Independents day,” *Online Journalism Review*, posted December 18, 2001. (ojr.usc.edu)

“When it comes to Net news, small can be beautiful.” That’s the subhead, and Lasica offers four in-

teresting examples—sites created and largely operated by one person that, in Lasica’s opinion, “[contribute] mightily to the craft of Web journalism.” I don’t always see things Lasica’s way, but he’s a keen observer. The four sites may be worth visits.

KenRadio.com comes from Ken Rutkowski, possibly the “Internet’s first Webcaster,” a programmer who pulls together ten or so top tech stories each day and produces a Web radio report out of Marina del Rey. “World Tech Roundup” reaches some 35,000 listeners a day through various Web outlets and some real radio stations. There’s also a free daily email newsletter, “Daily Tech News Click.”

I’ve heard of Kuro5hin before. Rusty Foster started and runs it; the name, pronounced “corrosion,” is a nerd’s take on Foster’s first name. Kuro5hin operates as an unusual collaborative posting system (that is, it consists of contributed posts, essays and articles): the placement of posts depends on member votes. Kuro5hin isn’t a Weblog clone: it “tries to kindle intelligent postings and interaction without leaving the site.” Foster claims that “every month or so you’ll come across something and say to yourself, ‘Damn, that’s a good story.’” That’s a great track record for a collaborative medium.

IWantMedia.com is a “media portal”—headline news, media industry news, job listings, and other media-related resources. Like Media Life (mentioned in *Cites & Insights* now and then), it’s oriented to those *within* print and online media more than to us innocent readers and viewers (OK, stop laughing). In some ways, it’s an alternative to Jim Romanesko’s Media News. There’s also a daily email newsletter.

Metafilter is reasonably well known. Like Kuro5hin, it’s a community site and has been noted for its fast eyewitness postings on September 11 (and, earlier, on the February 28 Seattle earthquake). It has more than 12,000 members. Anyone can post—but you have to wait a week after joining before posting to the front page. “Metafilter” is an odd name because there’s *no* filtering—neither Slashdot.org’s team of editors nor Kuro5hin’s reader votes. The founder, Matt Haughey, notes, “Anyone can put anything on our front page. And they do.”

Stereophile: Toys for [Rich] Boys

Faithful readers may note that sources for *Cites & Insights* sometimes range beyond library-related, computer technology, and media-related magazines and Websites. One of those is

Stereophile, cited at least three times last year. Given that one acquaintance recently called me an audiophile—possibly true 25 years ago, but misleading these days given my hearing, time and resources—I thought those citations could use explaining.

Reading the December 2001 issue (24:12—*Stereophile*’s been around for considerably more than 24 years, but it was somewhat irregular for the first decade or so), I noted two items that might be worth mentioning—but also noted the common themes of the magazine. My unkind rendering of those themes appears in this commentary’s title.

I subscribe to *Stereophile* for three reasons. First, it’s dirt-cheap by subscription. Second (most relevant to *Cites & Insights*), the “Industry Update” section includes cogent, careful reporting and commentary on issues of new audio standards, copyright, SSSCA and the like. Third, I find it an odd but frequent source of unintended humor.

How so? Several reasons. “Digital sucks, analog rocks.” *Stereophile* features several writers who would have you believe that their ears bleed when forced to listen to artificial, unmusical CDs, while LPs bring them back to life with *real* music. Add a whole set of themes that could be grouped under “euphonic distortion,” including lots of reports on how lovely certain expensive low-wattage tubed amplifiers sound, when bench testing shows that these amplifiers roll off high frequencies and distort all frequencies. In other words, these amplifiers make “pretty music” rather than reproducing what was recorded. In the days when *Stereophile*’s founder, J. Gordon Holt, was still running the show, this would be labeled for what it is: euphonic distortion (a term JGH may have originated). Now it’s the ineffable difference between measurement and audition. There are other oddities (e.g., one reviewer who appears more interested in his good buddies, the wonderful people who run the boutique audio companies, than in the actual quality of the products), but the real “toys for boys” issue is price. These are *expensive* toys, with no apparent relationship between price and value. (Incidentally, *Stereophile*’s crew abhors the idea of double-blind testing, no matter how it’s done.)

First, the interesting news and technology items from the December 2001 issue. Barry Willis reports on the SSSCA and some of its backers. He reminds us that the Disney people sued Sony to shut down VCRs 20 years ago, despite the enormous long-term benefits to Disney and other studios. Now they want to impose copy protection as a requirement in every digital processing device so they can squeeze every last cent out of the entertainment-buying public. Fortunately, this time a very large PC and con-

sumer electronics industry is adamantly opposed to the nonsense.

Jon Iverson provides a lengthy discussion of current plans for copy-protected CDs (Vivendi plans to have *all* of Universal's CDs protected by next spring) and some variants on this theme. One of many troubling points is that the labels don't seem to care that audio quality may be sacrificed in the race to prevent illegal—and legal—copying.

Then there are the equipment reviews. You probably don't care about the reviews themselves, and any *Cites & Insights* reader who spends this kind of money on stereo equipment probably already reads *Stereophile* or its chief rival, *The Absolute Sound*. (Yes, there's an exclamation point in the title.) I swear I'm not making any of this up. If you add up key prices below, you'll arrive at \$80,000 or more for a stereo system—but that includes amplifiers that are much cheaper than usual *Stereophile* recommendations, and doesn't include FM radio.

- Jonathan Scull raves about the Boulder 1012 D/A preamplifier. It costs \$15,000. A preamplifier provides for input control and some other controls prior to the amplifier that powers speakers; you might expect it to provide tone controls as well, but True Audiophiles dismiss bass and treble controls as unworthy. A preamp also traditionally provides “pre” amplification for phono cartridges, but with CDs and the like that isn't necessary. This device—which costs a little *less* than a top-of-the-line Honda Civic—doesn't include tone controls, but it does let you set the volume and adjust balance. You'd have to read the report to understand what it does do. It doesn't offer clean frequency response and it's a little noisy; channel separation is “good enough.” Amazingly, the reviewer says that he'd “*almost* call the piano sound through the Boulder's digital input...objectionable”—and, by the way, the unit *died* while it was being reviewed. What's the final judgment? If it was a car and it stopped working before the review was done, *Consumer Reports* would call it unacceptable. Jonathan Scull sez: “If you've got the bucks, go for it. This is one very extraordinary component.”
- Next up: Linn Kneckt Kivor hard-disk multizone music system. It's a file server (I guess it's got about 200GB storage), a “control center” that's really a dedicated Duron-based PC running Linux and having a proprietary sound card, a CD drive so you can copy CDs (uncompressed or ripped to MP3), and controls and converters so you can send digital sound files all over the place. Figure a \$1,000 com-

puter, \$500 to \$2,000 worth of hard disks (although one \$400 160GB drive might suffice), maybe a \$400 sound card, and some electronics. How much does it cost? \$20,000, *not* including installation. Oh, by the way, the hard disks are too noisy to use in the same room as your stereo system. (You don't want to ask the price of “audiophile” cable.) It works—but the reviewer noted that CDs played from the disk didn't sound quite as good as from Linn's high-end CD player. That player costs (are you sitting down) \$20,000 *by itself*.

- Here's the Dynaudio Evidence Temptation loudspeaker system—an affordable version of Dynaudio's “flagship” speaker system. What does affordable mean? In this case, \$30,000 a pair. But hey, the comparison is to an \$85,000/pair system. You've just saved enough to buy a small vacation house!
- The next unit costs a mere \$5,900 a pair. What is it? Tube amplifiers. They sound so much more musical than transistors, don't'cha know? They provide “a certain musical pulchritude that only tubes deliver, even if accompanied by thoroughly mediocre measurements.” In other words, proper stereophilia is *not* high fidelity: it's making *sweet* music out of whatever was recorded. And no cost is too great. This amp doesn't provide great “bass dynamics” and measures badly (much worse than a run-of-the-mill \$1,000 receiver, for example), but so what?
- Some people like solid-state amplifiers, though. For those folks, Robert Deutsch reviews the 47 Laboratory 4706 Gaincard power amplifier. It offers all of 25 watts output, pitiful by “mid-fi” standards (Sony, Yamaha, Pioneer, that trash)—but it has a small part count (and isn't that what you're looking for?). It costs a mere \$3,300. It doesn't measure all that well, but what can you expect for \$3,300?
- Finally, here's the VPI TNT V-HR turntable with tonearm. Remember, *real* music comes from LPs. For \$8,000 (not including cartridge), you can hear some of that real music. You'll have to check the level of the turntable frequently, you have to “keep the belts well-powdered and carefully aligned,” but the table “wasn't at all finicky.” I'll just mention in passing that you really should be using \$4,000 power conditioners (that draw twice as much power as the devices plugged into them) to make it all sound even better.

That's just one issue. This entertainment continues 12 times a year, along with detailed (and very good) CD and LP reviews, comments from manufacturers,

sometimes-lengthy letters sections, and a wonderful feeling of being in some alternate universe.

Cheap Shots and Commentary

Pack, Thomas, "Keeping digital text safe," *EContent* 24:9 (November 2001), pp. 20-5.

Overall, Pack offers an interesting update on digital rights management as viewed by "content producers." But there are troublesome points, beginning with a lead paragraph that I find questionable:

For every piece of content sold online, six copies are reproduced somewhere else without permission.

That's an estimate from SealedMedia—a company that sells ways to prevent such "piracy." Peter Kumik of SealedMedia "said he has heard that estimate from several publishers." Are there facts to back such estimates? Should I react as I would if a Yale Lock spokesperson claimed that burglars attempt to enter each house in the U.S. an average of once a month?

Here's another Kumik quote. "When our first customer went online...their most common support call was people complaining that they couldn't cut and paste anymore... They think that because it's so easy to forward on a PDF document or cut and paste a Web page that it's actually legal." The case against forwarding may be clear enough, but not so for cut-and-paste, specifically using a portion of a document you've *purchased* for other purposes. I would argue that fair use allows you to do so. I suppose the DRM software includes one of those interminable "legal documents" that you must agree to before you're allowed to complete your transaction, thereby signing away your normal purchase or use rights. Poof! You're a pirate! Of course, if the "anti-piracy" forces succeed in moving UCITA or SSSCA along (which seems increasingly unlikely), the law will be entirely on their side, no matter how unreasonable the contract nor how deeply-buried the waiver of normal fair-use and first-sale rights.

I'm confident I can use the quotations above without violating *EContent's* or Thomas Pack's intellectual property rights. The sentences represent a tiny portion of the article (and the magazine) as a whole, and I'm quoting them as part of commentary. But if the article was online and protected by SealedMedia, I could be prevented from cutting-and-pasting—and regarded as a pirate for the attempt.

Here's another DRM spokesperson expressing the view of customers that I find so depressing:

"Students spend about \$600 on textbooks each year for their classes. If they can get that \$600 worth of content for free, they will." No nuances, not "some of them," not "and maybe \$600 is too much." Just this: *consumers are thieves and it's up to us to stop them.* Arggh.

For a bit of balance, here's David Curle of Outsell Inc on why some firms aren't much interested in DRM. "The existing contractual enforcement of digital rights is enough for many kinds of content providers [e.g. LexisNexis]. They don't seem very interested in DRM because they're dealing with organizations staffed by responsible people who want to follow the law." He goes on to mention possible abuse, but that the overall model works pretty well.

So it does—and so it does for Ebsco, OCLC, RLG, and others serving *millions* of indirect customers through licensed databases. Most people aren't thieves, and most "thieves" aren't pirates.

Tristram, Claire, "The next computer interface," *Technology Review* December 2001. (www.technologyreview.com)

Oh please. "The desktop metaphor was a brilliant invention—30 years ago. Now it's an unmanageable mess, and the search is on for a better way to handle information."

Do you actually think of your computer screen as a desktop? Do you litter files all over the screen itself, lump them awkwardly into random folders, and find them impossible to retrieve? Or do you assign folders and subfolders intelligently *to suit your own habits*, use the Finder or Explorer (or, better yet, PowerDesk) together with handy search utilities to track older documents, and use the "most recent" menus in applications to get back to current work?

For me, it's the latter: I think of the Windows "desktop" as a background for primary applications—and that's about it. I find files anything but "unmanageable" and wonder what all the fuss is about. After reading some of the surefire solutions, I wonder even more.

David Gelernter has a solution: "Software that automatically arranges your computer files in chronological order and displays them on your monitor with the most recent files featured prominently in the foreground." This, according to Tristram, is a "novel metaphor."

Wow. If I chose to dump all my documents into a single subfile instead of arranging them by project, it would take all of one click in Windows Explorer to do the same thing—and one click, never again repeated, in PowerDesk. Novel? For that matter, Word, Excel, and other applications *automatically* show the most recently used documents.

If I'm working on *Cites & Insights* the last thing I want is to have yesterday's update of the household budget in my foreground. That's why I use project folders. This isn't rocket science.

"If you have ever forgotten what you named a file or which folder you put it in, you probably will agree that it's time for a change." Particularly if, for some reason, Sherlock on your Mac and File Finder in Windows have suddenly stopped working—or you can't think of anything within the file that would identify it. "Big, messy hierarchies of folders" certainly exist *if you choose to make them big and messy*.

Other researchers want to replace folders with "3-D schemes that use our sense of spatial orientation to create the illusion of depth on-screen, so that documents look closer or farther away depending on their importance to us." How does the interface determine what's important to us? The article is silent on that point.

The article does include a quote from Dan Russell on a study at IBM's Almaden Research Center. "We wanted to find people who didn't understand the function of file folders, how to open files, how to delete files. We couldn't find anyone. That makes it hard to change people's expectations of how computers should behave."

Read that again. "*We couldn't find anyone.*" Is it possible that a bunch of researchers are trying to sell us solutions for which no real problem exists?

Gelernter assures us that we've stopped using folders and file cabinets in real life: "Even 10 years ago the notion of putting stuff in files and sticking certain files in folders and others on your desktop was already broken down and failing." Really? Don't try to take away my Pendaflex folders at work; they're how I keep projects organized. I didn't realize I was ten years out of date. (I'm supposed to stack everything in a leaning pile on my desk?)

Gelernter's Scopeware isn't just a reverse-chronological file list. You get a "tilting stack of file cards" on screen, and if you mouse around enough you can get summaries of documents and even quick views. Sort of like PowerDesk with QuickView and the viewing pane enabled, but you don't get snazzy tilting stacks of file cards with PowerDesk.

Oh, there's more: Scopeware "sorts information automatically, streaming it into predetermined categories." If I don't determine those categories, then you're losing the information; if they are, then they're folders—aren't they?

Gelernter is not trying to replace Windows. He wants you to organize your information *through a browser*. "We aren't taking on Windows at all. That would be suicidal."

One researcher recognizes that the Windows or Mac desktop really isn't much of a metaphor; it's just a working environment that you can fashion to suit your own tastes. Maybe you put project folders on the desktop; I never do. Some people's desktops have nothing on them but the mandatory icons; they prefer to use menus for everything. I can respect that. I start Word, then choose documents; many people start by double-clicking on a document. Both Windows and, increasingly, the Mac OS let each user determine her own preferred working style. But that's not theoretically interesting and won't sell new software.

"Conceivably, an inference engine can be made so intelligent that any change in the desktop metaphor itself becomes unnecessary: machines would automatically present information to you as you need it, eliminating the clutter and confusion that currently plague our computer desktops." Such rhetoric—and such an improbable outcome. I don't want my PC deciding what "information" I want next, thank you—and if I was "plagued" by "clutter and confusion" on my PC desktop, I'd fix it.

Some folks want to go further. Convergence turns out to be nonsense, so why not go for divergence? A PC should be for nothing but spreadsheets and text documents; everything else should be on some specialized device. Right. (Gelernter doesn't buy that notion.)

"Even if the desktop metaphor never goes away completely, it will likely recede..." For most of us, I believe, it receded about an hour after we became comfortable with our computers. That's the problem for the Big Thinkers.

The Details

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