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Intersections

Ethics and Access 1: The Sad Case of Jeffrey Beall

Open access (OA) is all about ethics, economics and equity, and the three interact in various ways. OA is inherently at the intersection of libraries, media, policy and technology—but that’s a different issue.

This is the first of a trio of essays: two related to fairly specific situations, one covering a range of ethical discussions. Depending on how you define “ethics,” I could also include sections on Elsevier and OA, embargoes, fallacious and misleading anti-OA arguments and the whole area of peer review. Or maybe not. In any case, we lead off with the sad case of Jeffrey Beall.

Since Beall’s chief claim to fame is his ever-growing list of supposedly predatory OA journals, and since I’m showing the case for treating Beall as a questionable source, I have to say this: In case you’re thinking “Walt’s claiming there are no scam OA journals,” I’m not—and toward the end of this essay, I’ll quote some useful ways to avoid scam journals regardless of their business model.

Before the Storm

By [his own admission](#), Jeffrey Beall came late to the OA party. His interest began in 2009—22 years after the first known U.S. gold OA scholarly journal appeared (*New Horizons in Adult Education*), 19 years after the first U.S. gold OA scholarly journal in the library field *that I know of* appeared, a journal I was involved in for most of its life (*The Public-Access Computer Systems Review*), eight years after I started writing about the field and seven years after the meetings and proclamations that gave it its name.

Coming late is fine. OA needs to have more people involved all the time. Beall’s involvement was al-

ways a little different, however. He first encountered OA when [reviewing a publisher](#), Bentham Open, for *The Charleston Advisor*. It’s a very negative review for what seem to be good reasons, and at the time Beall seemed to be at least potentially positive about OA itself, based on the first sentence of this extract:

The Open Access model is a good one, for it makes research freely available to everyone. However, Bentham Open is exploiting the good will of those who established the Open Access model by twisting it and exploiting it for profit. Just because a journal is Open Access doesn’t make it legitimate or high quality.

I can’t imagine there are many knowledgeable folks who would argue with that last sentence, which would be *equally* correct if you substituted “subscription-based” or “very expensive” or “published by one of the big journal publishers” for “Open Access.” It should boil down to this: Just because a journal exists or has a given business model or is from a given publisher doesn’t automatically make it legitimate or high quality.

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But there’s an oddity in the review, which is presumably of *one* OA publisher. Beall finds it necessary to quote an Elsevier executive and praise Elsevier:

Speaking against the “author pays” model, Crispin Davis, the CEO of Reed Elsevier said, “if you are receiving potential payment for every article submitted, there is an inherent conflict of interest that could threaten the quality of the peer review system.” Indeed, McCabe and Snyder state, “Good articles provide a reader benefit; bad articles do not. Readers cannot tell the quality of articles prior to reading them, and reading an article requires an effort cost.” Here again, these statements bring to mind the role of the collection development librarian in making resource selection decisions that benefit library users. In addition, they offer a new perspective on the high subscription costs of journals published by companies like Reed Elsevier. Perhaps the **consistent high quality** their journals

bring justifies the high subscription prices after all. Given the increasing number of Open Access STM journals, scholars need a reliable means of finding only the research worth reading. [Emphasis added.]

Apparently Beall would disagree with my “It should boil down” above—he’s asserting that *all* Elsevier journals are high quality (or at least that’s how I read “consistent”). Setting that aside, it’s my impression that a fair number of Elsevier journals charge page charges and other forms of “author pays,” and there’s no question that Elsevier and other big publishers use increasing numbers of published articles as one basis for ever-rising prices. Thus, the Crispin Davis quote applies equally well to many subscription journals.

I haven’t followed all of Beall’s work (you can find quite a bit of it from the “Research” tab of his blog [Scholarly Open Access](#)), but it’s pretty clear that he’s made a specialty of identifying gold OA journals and publishers as being predatory and unworthy—and, in the process, started taking more and more swipes at OA itself. There was apparently an earlier Posterous blog that has disappeared along with Posterous itself; the current incarnation began in January 2012.

Just looking at the January 2012 archive begins to suggest real issues in what might otherwise be an admirable pursuit. Consider, for example, “Scholarly Open-Access Publishing and the ‘Imprimatur of Science,’” [posted January 25, 2012](#). He discusses a chapter of *The AIDS conspiracy: Science fights back* and says it “indirectly relates to scholarly open-access publishing.” How?

The author tells the story of an Elsevier journal called *Medical hypotheses* that some AIDS denialists used to legitimize their arguments that HIV doesn’t cause AIDS. Summarizing, Natrass wrote, “The episode highlights the importance of peer review as a core scientific value” (p. 135).

She defines and discusses boundary work, which is work by scientists that essentially draws a line between what counts as science and what doesn’t.

Medical hypotheses allowed denialists’ work to be published without peer review, while still conveying scientific status. Defending peer review, Natrass states that “For all its faults, peer review remains an essential mechanism for the allocation of trust in the results of others” (p. 139).

Wow! That’s pretty shocking! *Medical hypotheses* must be some predatory gold OA journal from...wait, Elsevier? That publisher with “consistent high quality”? Well, at least it must be a gold OA...hmm. Nope. As with many Elsevier journals these days, the jour-

nal (which still exists) offers a pricey OA *option*, but it’s a subscription journal. It was an Elsevier journal without traditional peer review (unlike nearly all gold OA journals), but it was nonetheless an Elsevier subscription-based journal.

But when Beall looks at apparent failure in peer review by a subscription-based journal **published by the world’s largest STM journal publisher**, he sees this:

Many questionable open-access publishers are making a mockery of peer review. Unfortunately, it’s hard for us to observe and validate their peer-review practices, for they are not transparent.

It’s like seeing JP Morgan Chase pay a multibillion-dollar fine for questionable business practices and concluding that credit unions must be sketchy!

In the same month, and I’d guess many times since, Beall explicitly equated gold OA with “author-pays model,” either ignorant of or deliberately ignoring the fact that most gold OA journals don’t have article-processing charges and that a higher percentage of subscription-based journals than gold OA journals *do* have author-side charges (or page and other charges).

Beall started with a list of a few “predatory” publishers. The list grew by leaps and bounds, sometimes including long-established publishing houses with the misfortune of being headquartered in India (specifically, Hindawi), with Beall acting as prosecutor, judge and jury on who’s predatory and who’s not. He’s still doing it—in just one year, his list nearly doubled in size. Recent posts have made it clear that Beall’s own criteria are all that matter: He’s the one-man authority on predatory—but only predatory OA—publishing. Remarkably, hundreds if not thousands of librarians and others seem to take Beall’s word as gospel.

I looked at Beall’s list of questionable practices. It’s an interesting list, including this item:

The publisher requires transfer of copyright and retains copyright on journal content.

Which means nearly all subscription-based journal publishers engage in questionable practices.

I didn’t read all of Beall’s blog posts. I honestly don’t know whether the misleading items noted above are typical or special cases. As with most library folk, I was appalled when a publisher attempted to sue Beall for libel—but being sued for unfortunate reasons doesn’t automatically make the defendant a saint. As with a number of other people who’ve been involved with and writing about OA for years, I was growing increasingly nervous about

Beall's growing stridency about "predatory" OA publishers—and amazement that there never seem to be sketchy or predatory *subscription* publishers, even among those charging high page charges and other article fees.

The Wheels Come Off...

Then came May 7, 2013, when the wheels *really* came off the Beall Express. The story picks up from there.

The Serials Crisis is Over.

That absurd title heads [this May 7, 2013 post](#) by Beall at *Scholarly Open Access*; just below it is a silly image of a locked version of the OA open-lock with smart quotes around it.

Huh?

I declare that the serials crisis, the event that gave birth to the open-access movement, is over. I base my declaration on my observations as an academic librarian and on the scholarly literature, selections from which I include here:

That first sentence may qualify as "not even wrong." Beall's evidence that the serials crisis "gave birth to the open-access movement?" I guess because Beall says so. Just to be clear: If all scholarly journal publishers agreed that, for every academic library in the world, the total cost for *all scholarly journals* would be, say, 20% of the library budget (which would be much lower than what most medium-sized and larger academic libraries spend now), *that would not eliminate the need for OA*. Just for starters, it would not provide *any* access to me or any other researcher or layman who's not affiliated with an academic institution.

In any case, that's not likely to happen, and the serials crisis is only "over" to the extent that academic libraries are being *slowly* bled to death by journal costs rather than being *rapidly* bled to death. Price increases are still much higher than inflation; even Harvard can't afford all the journals they'd like to have.

The rest of the post consists of Beall's "evidence" for the serials crisis being over. What evidence? Let's see:

- The first is an assertion within a report (not in any sense part of the scholarly literature) to the International Association of Scientific, Technical and Medical Publishers—a trade group that *wants* to believe the crisis is over.
- The second, which is peer-reviewed, claims that the serials crisis may not be "as acute as some have suggested" and that "most aca-

demics are clearly operating productively under the existing methods of scholarly communication." (The article itself is behind a paywall—but in any case the excerpt only argues that the crisis *within academia* is less severe than some claim. It's also pretty limited, based on *eight New Zealand universities*.)

- The third is, astonishingly, excerpted from an interview with Derk Haank, at the time CEO of Springer and formerly chair of Elsevier Science. Is it any surprise that Haank says the crisis is over?
- The fourth is apparently a peer-reviewed article and the excerpt says ARL libraries—the ones most able to handle serials price increases—get a lot more serials (not necessarily journals) now than they did in 1989-1990. (Specifically, the asserted median has gone from 21,187 to 80,292.) How this establishes that the serials crisis is over for all academic libraries or that open access is less necessary? It doesn't. It says that the Big Deal increased the number of available journals; it says *nothing* about affordability or about access beyond ARL libraries. (Just as a reality check, I looked at FY2010 figures for Carnegie Classification 15, which appears to encompass what used to be Research I and II and includes 151 reporting institutions: it's not quite the same set as ARL. The median number of *serials* is 59,942; 48 of them have 80,292 or more, and that 48th institution is *precisely* 80,292. If you're wondering, the median number of serials for Carnegie Classification 16, what used to be Doctoral I and II, is 12,739 serials.)
- The fifth? Eureka: this one *does* specifically say that the Big Deals "essentially resolved the serials crisis by 2004." It's behind a paywall. It's a short communication, not a scholarly article, appearing in *Learned Publishing* (when I had a full article in that publication, it was not peer-reviewed). Oh, and it's *by Jeffrey Beall*—the piece appears to be another attack on gold OA. So his one solid piece of evidence is...quoting himself.

Go through that list again. I don't know about you, but it strikes me as remarkably thin.

The first comment, by Steve Hitchcock, is interesting—as it accepts the quotes at face value (which I'm not prepared to do for either Haank or Beall):

You make two assertions in your opening sentence: 1 there was a serials crisis, 2 this led to open access.

Your selective quotes do not show either, so it is hard to justify your headline point on this evidence. What your quotes may show, however, is that the serials crisis was about journals pricing, and the Big Deal was a response to that. But the Big Deal is not open access, and the case for open access is not over.

As for the first assertion, in a way it's true: there never was a serials crisis, there were—and are—many serials (primarily journals) crises affecting different segments of academia in different ways.

The next comment, by Pierre de Villiers, makes another interesting point (although I partly disagree with the first sentence, which offers too narrow a case for OA):

The main case for open access is free access to public-funded research. The big deal does not solve that, and actually worsen the situation by consuming library budgets in favour of those big deal-publishers, excluding journals from smaller publishers. I also doubt the statement that the far-above-inflation in serial subscriptions came to an end. Is this supported by evidence?

Beall “responds” to the question with a non-answer: “Please see quotation number 4, which shows that libraries pay a lot less per journal title than they did in the past.” Actually, the quotation doesn't say that at all. It says *the median ARL library*, not in any way typical of all academic libraries, gets four times as many serials (most of them, presumably, *not* refereed scholarly journals) as it did a decade earlier. It says nothing about how much that library paid. Across extensive doctoral institutions, a somewhat larger group of libraries, the median library also spent 51% more on serials in 2010 than in 2000 *after adjusting for inflation*, which pretty much answers Villiers' question. (For all academic libraries taken as a group and *not* adjusting for inflation, 2010 serials spending was considerably more than twice the level of 2000 spending—and close to 65% higher *after* inflation. If you want to see a truly gulp-inducing graph, consider ARLs’ [“Expenditure Trends in ARL Libraries, 1986-2011”](#) with its 402% increase in serials expenditures.)

Dr. Gunn offers a quick snark questioning the assertion that academics are doing just fine—and Andrew Miller basically says that's true, quoting yet another publisher-association report...and admitting that he's an Elsevier publisher, perhaps not a wholly disinterested party.

Mike Taylor takes the light approach:

Jeffrey, was this post a satire? If so, of what? Sorry if I am being dense, I just don't get it.

To which Beall responds by basically repeating his absurd assertion.

Karen Coyle chose to point to my book *The Big Deal and the Damage Done*, which came about partly because of other claims that the Big Deal had solved the serials crisis, and says my analysis suggests Beall is wrong. His response?

I think you've got it backwards. He should have read the sources I cite first.

To which I felt a need to respond:

I had in fact read most of the sources you cite. The suggestion that quotable sources, mostly publishing-related, count for more than the actual facts is an amusing one, but I think I'll go with the real world for now. (Also, as has been said before, the serials crisis is neither the only nor the primary reason for OA.)

In fairness—and because it's a nice touch—I should quote Vinz Clortho's response to my comment:

Jeffrey's sources are better. He said so.

Which is, in essence, what Beall's trainwreck of a post boils down to: Beall's right because Beall says so. And has mostly Beall and publishing industry assertions to back him up. Well, and eight New Zealand universities.

The comments for this post served as an interesting set of revelations into Beall's mind and methods. Joe Kraus points out that unaffiliated scholars and others (and those not affiliated with the very largest institutions) would not agree that the serials crisis was over, and cites others who also would not agree—including students at his “well funded private university library in south Denver” who don't have access to some journals because even Kraus's library can't afford it. Beall's response? Go for the jugular:

So, let me check my understanding, the University of Denver, which charges outrageously high tuition, especially in its mediocre library school, is worried about people who don't have access to some scholarly publications? If DU is so worried about “access,” then it ought to lower its tuition. Also, DU just completed a 35 million dollar renovation of its library and you whine about not being able to afford a couple four-thousand dollar journal titles? This doesn't add up.

Whew. Extent to which this is *in any way* a refutation of what Kraus says: Zero. Extent to which this is pure *ad hominem* on an institutional level...well, read it yourself. Kraus agrees “this doesn't add up”:

I agree that this doesn't add up. The Univ. could spend like Harvard and still not get all of the content that our students and faculty need or want. You did a good job of ignoring my first point concerning the

independent researchers; the big deal doesn't help them get info at all. Open Access helps all people get better access to more information, research, and knowledge and for less cost in the long run.

Harvard has explicitly said it can't afford all the serials it would like to have, which should suggest a bit of weakness in "the serials crisis is over" and the absurd extension that OA isn't needed. (The extension makes no sense in any case.)

Skipping over a couple of other comments—one a bit snarky for my taste, one with which I agree but will leave out for the sake of brevity, we get this from Matt Thomas, who makes an excellent point for all but the most comprehensive universities with the biggest budgets:

It seems like the quotes and your argument is based on the average price per journal title but that doesn't take into consideration that most of these titles are products that we probably would never have wanted in the first place. In order to get the e-journals we want, we are still having to pay increases in excess of inflation. Adding mediocre content to quality content doesn't make the crisis go away. If one person paid for the "Mona Lisa" for \$100M and then sold it along with one painting their child made in grade 3 for \$105M, that doesn't mean that the "Mona Lisa" has dropped in price by almost half. But I'm probably missing something.

Beall's already on record as saying that Elsevier journals offer "consistently high quality," which may be his answer to arguments like this. Mel DeSart offers another (related) insight into the ongoing set of serials crises. Excerpting:

[W]hen the price increases on those *_bundles_*, which in some cases is the only way to acquire the content you really WANT, still exceed the CPI, rate of inflation, and the average materials budget increases that libraries across the country are receiving, why would anyone think the serials crisis was over???

DeSart's working with the factual world; consult [The Big Deal and the Damage Done](#) if that's in doubt.

Steve Lawson offers a comment that's better read directly—and took the time to read more of the fourth source:

Perhaps you didn't finish reading the entire abstract, the last sentence of which reads, "More importantly, these 'Big Deals' appear to point the way to the future of the whole economy, where progress is characterized by declining privacy, increasing price discrimination, increasing opaqueness in pricing, increasing reliance on low-paid or unpaid work of others for profits, and business models that depend on customer inertia." Those characteristics are the hallmarks of

the serials crisis, something barely offset by publishers throwing in thousands of "free" journals to their Big Deal packages, journals that the library doesn't necessarily want, but cannot easily opt out of.

There are a few more comments—and I suggest reading them and the full post—but let's move on to another response and later events in this sad story.

Of course the serials crisis is not over, what the heck are you talking about?

So says Mike Taylor in [this May 8, 2013 post](#) at *Sauropod Vertebra Picture of the Week* (henceforth SVPOW). I admire his charitable first impulse:

I admit my first reaction was that it was some kind of parody or satire, but Beall's subsequent comments seem to rule out that charitable interpretation.

Taylor apparently had trouble with Beall's moderation and chose to write this post instead (although he did have one comment show up on the post, as noted above).

Beall's response to Joe Kraus's comment was simply an attack on the university that he works for — an attack that Joe took rather graciously. But what about all the other people that he mentions? It's hard to avoid the conclusion that the lines are as follows: those who say that the serial crisis is over are the hugely profitable incumbents; those who say it is not are scholars, librarians, editors, doctors, students, and in fact every single group that doesn't stand to gain financially from the continuation of the status quo. Doesn't that look just a tiny bit suspicious? (I asked Beall this: that was one of the comments that was censored.)

Then Taylor quotes all of the abstract for the Odlyzko paper from which Beall extracted his crucial Fourth Quote (you know, the one about having ever so many more serials these days). Since Steve Lawson *did* get a comment accepted that included part of that abstract, I won't quote the whole thing here, but can't resist the urge to quote some of it:

Publishers, through the oft-reviled "Big Deal" packages, are providing much greater and more egalitarian access to the journal literature, an approximation to true Open Access. In the process they are also marginalizing libraries, and obtaining a greater share of the resources going into scholarly communication. This is enabling a continuation of publisher profits as well as of what for decades has been called "unsustainable journal price escalation". It is also inhibiting the spread of Open Access, and potentially leading to an oligopoly of publishers controlling distribution through large-scale licensing. [Emphasis added.]

In other words, Odlyzko is, in fact, saying that the serials crisis continues and is in some ways even worse. I'll quote Taylor's final two paragraphs:

This is a classic example of quote mining.

I'm afraid that at this point in the development of his site, Beall is looking less and less like someone offering a helpful service to researchers looking for open-access venues; and more and more like a troll.

Among the comments, one points to an earlier Beall post (conflating OA and "author misconduct") as more evidence that he's become a troll, and a longer comment from Karen Coyle calls Beall "the library world's Rush Limbaugh" and says he has "negated any of the value of his analysis of open access scams by his overt prejudices." Another says "I don't want to believe that Beall has a hidden agenda against 'Open Access model'"—but, as we'll see a bit later, that agenda is no longer hidden.

It Didn't Work for Phil Ochs, It Doesn't Work for Jeffrey Beall

I also commented, [on May 8, 2013](#) at *Walt at Random*, in a post that dealt with several other things as well. (The reference is to Phil Ochs' song "I Declare the War is Over"—which did very little to end the Vietnam War.) Since I've covered much of this already, I'll just quote one key segment—attempting to respond to Beall's claims with facts:

Fact: The serials crisis did not give birth to the OA movement, or at least it certainly wasn't the only causative factor. There are several important reasons to support OA, only one of which is the serials crisis. (Solving the affordability crises for academic libraries—if that had happened, *which it clearly has not*—does NOTHING to provide access to all of us unaffiliated types: independent scholars, patients, everybody else, just to name one issue.)

Fact: The serials crisis is not over in any real-world sense. Even Harvard can't afford the serials it wants—and other academic libraries can't afford to keep being libraries and keep up with serials prices.

Of course, my book isn't part of the "scholarly literature." It's entirely fact-based, the facts are entirely reproducible, I was entirely transparent about my methodology, and I believe it's in the best traditions of scholarship (except that there's no literature review and I didn't actually begin with a hypothesis)...but I'm not a scholar and didn't submit it to a refereed journal.

(Most of the rest of the post is about my book, *The Big Deal and the Damage Done*.)

From May to December

Beall continued identifying so-called predatory (now expanded to predatory and "questionable") publishers and journals—(almost) all of them gold OA, of course. Some of us had written him off, but others still paid attention. He also took the time to slam article-level metrics as "ill-conceived and meretricious" and accuse OA of promulgating pseudo-science (since, you know, important subscription-based publishers would *never* have, say, [journals](#) devoted to a "science" whose entire basis has to do with water having memory).

...and Beall Doubles Down

And then this happened:

The Open-Access Movement is Not Really about Open Access

That's the title of Jeffrey Beall's [contribution](#) to a special OA section of non-refereed articles in *triple C: communication, capitalism & critique* (11:2). It may be worth noting that this journal (which includes both peer-reviewed articles and other stuff, all of it clearly labeled) is, ahem, a gold OA journal—albeit one that (as with *most* gold OA journals) does *not* charge article processing fees.

If that fairly startling title isn't enough, here's the abstract in full:

While the open-access (OA) movement purports to be about making scholarly content open-access, its true motives are much different. The OA movement is an anti-corporatist movement that wants to deny the freedom of the press to companies it disagrees with. The movement is also actively imposing onerous mandates on researchers, mandates that restrict individual freedom. To boost the open-access movement, its leaders sacrifice the academic futures of young scholars and those from developing countries, pressuring them to publish in lower-quality open-access journals. The open-access movement has fostered the creation of numerous predatory publishers and standalone journals, increasing the amount of research misconduct in scholarly publications and the amount of pseudo-science that is published as if it were authentic science.

Say what?

First there's the odd suggestion that there is *one thing* called "the OA movement." Then there's the suggestion that the OA movement—not the NIH and Congress, not university faculties—is somehow imposing "onerous mandates."

Since the article is itself OA, you can download the PDF and read it yourself. It's pretty astonishing,

and I hesitate to quote much of it because I don't want to be confused with *The Onion*. Consider this blanket claim about (all?) OA advocates: "OA advocates want to make collective everything and eliminate private business, except for small businesses owned by the disadvantaged." While I've called myself an OA independent, by Beall's lights I am doubtless an advocate—and have been involved for 24 years, far longer than he's been critiquing. My interest in general collectivizing and eliminating large private businesses is nonexistent, which I strongly suspect is true for most OA advocates.

We are also told, "The open-access movement is a negative movement rather than a positive one. It is more a movement against something than it is a movement for something." That's also nonsense: it is a movement *for access to scholarly research*. We also hear that "the gold open-access model actually incentivizes corruption." Oddly enough, given that Big Deals generally *trap* libraries into maintaining subscriptions to journals they would otherwise cancel, Beall claims just the opposite: "Publishers always had to keep their subscribers happy or they would cancel." He takes a swipe at the Semantic Web (which he says is dying a slow death) for reasons that I can't fathom, except that it allows him to call OA "the 'Semantic Web' of scholarly communications."

I'll quote another bit here—but with the prefatory information, admittedly repetitious, that *a higher percentage of subscription journals charge author-side fees, typically called page charges, than the percentage of OA journals that charge article processing charges*. That's important, given this:

Money, a source of corruption, was absent from the author-publisher relationship (except in the rare case of reasonable page charges levied on authors publishing with non-profit learned societies) in the traditional publishing model.

Ask scholars about those "reasonable page charges" and how they're only levied by non-profit societies sometime. You may get an earful.

Beall claims that "only a few publishers" employ the gold OA model ethically—and that most of those are cutting corners and lowering standards. He's gone beyond raising alarms about "predatory" publishers to general condemnation of gold OA (published in a gold OA journal).

I confess to not going through the whole nine-page article carefully; I lacked the stamina to deal with it. Rather than doing my own fiscing of an article that appears to deserve paragraph-by-paragraph refutation, I'll turn to other commen-

taries. The issue must have appeared in late November or early December 2013; the reactions mostly appeared in mid-December.

Jeffrey Beall Needlessly Compromises Credibility of Beall's List

We'll start with someone I rarely quote: Stevan Harnad, writing [on December 9, 2013](#) at his GOAL/amsciforum mail list. Harnad is all about green OA, as he's made clear a few thousand times. After a citation, he begins:

This wacky article is going to be fun to review. I still think Jeff Beall is doing something useful with his naming and shaming of junk OA journals, but I now realize that he is driven by some sort of fanciful conspiracy theory! "OA is all an anti-capitalist plot." (Even on a quick skim it is evident that Jeff's article is rife with half-truths, errors and downright nonsense. Pity. It will diminish the credibility of his valid exposés, but maybe this is a good thing, if the judgment and motivation behind Beall's list is as kooky as this article! But alas it will now also give the genuine "predatory" junk-journals some specious arguments for discrediting Jeff's work altogether. Of course it will also give the publishing lobby some good sound-bites, but they use them at their peril, because of all the other nonsense in which they are nested!)

There were already moves afoot to establish a *credible* method for identifying what Harnad calls "junk-journals"—something that's needed, since there have indeed been some profiteers who seem to assume that authors don't actually investigate the journals they submit to—but I'd say the piece has done more than *diminish* the credibility of Beall's efforts. But that's me.

The item linked to here is the start of a thread of other messages from various people on the list. The thread involves quite a few people, including Beall himself, who—in confirming that he wrote the article and stands by it, since someone suggested it might have been a spoof—says "Prof. Harnad and his lackeys are responding just as my article predicts." Ah, *his lackeys!* The set of Harnadians pushing Gold OA is one of those special sets of lackeys that fall in the same category as unicorns farting rainbows.

It's quite a thread. Unfortunately, it's a little difficult to find Harnad's promised actual critique of Beall's ~~rant~~ article, but [this post](#) offers some tidbits, at least.

The spectre of corporatism in academic libraries, or, Beall has Gone Bananas.

This one is from Anton Angelo posted [on or before December 10, 2013](#) at *mumbles*. (The post doesn't

include a date, but I tagged it on December 10 and the first comment appears on that date.) He leads with this:

Jeffrey Beall has essentially discredited himself. The time has come to take his important work in identifying predatory publishers from him, and run another list, one that can be trusted.

Angelo appreciated Beall's list and "forgave him a certain amount of self-aggrandizement"...until the *triple C* article appeared.

His argument boils down to the following: the OA movement is really a monolithic stalking horse behind which there is a cabal wanting to establish centralised control of academic publishing. Which is, of course, nonsense.

It's a pity, because the moderates that support OA will see him as a bit of a loony, and will no longer trust his good work on predatory publishing. Those on the libertarian right will think he's entertainingly provocative, and those on the infantile left (to borrow from Lenin) will see him as a traitor.

There's more, but that may say enough. There are two comments—one from Joe Esposito, no friend of OA himself (or at least he's never appeared to be) expressing his disappointment in the article...and one from Jeffrey Beall indulging in a personal attack on Esposito.

Beall's Litter

Michael Eisen responds to Beall in [this December 14, 2013 post](#) at *it is NOT junk*, and it's fair to say that he's not entirely convinced by Beall:

The piece is so ill-informed and angry that I can't really describe it. So I'm just going to reproduce his article here (it was, ironically, published in an open access journal with a Creative Commons license allowing me to do so), along with my comments.

There follows a complete reprint of the article—with inserted red-text paragraphs where Eisen feels the need to offer a response. For example, here's the first commentary, immediately following the first paragraph of the abstract:

It is rather amusing to hear open access described as "anti-corporatist" seeing as the primary push for open access has come from corporations such as PLOS and BioMed Central, a for profit company recently purchased by one of the world's largest publishing houses.

There's a *lot* more—this is a *very* long post, not quite a fisking but close to it. I won't attempt to include all of Eisen's comments (some of which I might take issue with). Indeed, as I skim through them, I won't include any more: You should read them in the original, in the

context of Beall's article. **If you don't read any other response to Beall, you should [read this one](#).**

Parting Company with Jeffrey Beall

I rarely cite *the scholarly kitchen* just as I rarely cite Jeffrey Beall's blog or Stevan Harnad's lists: in general, I find extremists less useful to consider. But this post by Joseph Esposito [on December 16, 2013](#) is an exception, if only because Esposito not only finds the Beall article over the top but was (like some of us but not, unfortunately, like Beall's devoted followers) getting uneasy about Beall in general.

It is Esposito and Skitch, so we get this: "There are inherent structural problems with Gold Open Access and sooner or later unscrupulous people were going to exploit them." Hell, there are inherent structural problems with Big Deal subscription publishing—serious ones—whereas "platinum" OA (which is to say *most actual Gold OA, not including all the phantom journals*) does *not* invite unscrupulous people. The unstated equation (that all Gold OA includes article processing charges) continues to be false and to undermine the credibility of anybody saying it. But let's proceed:

Since I first became aware of Beall's List, however, I have been following some of Beall's work with growing unease. Here and there some (to me) distasteful political ideology peeked through (with my pragmatic mindset, any kind of ideology makes me queasy), but you don't have to agree with somebody all the time to agree with them some of the time. But now, in a recent screed, he has crossed the line. While I continue to admire Beall's List, the broader critique (really an assault) of Gold OA and those who advocate it is too strong for me. Sorry, Jeffrey, but I'm not with you on this.

The "recent screed" is, of course, the *triple C* article. Esposito quotes two sentences from Beall's conclusion—"The open-access movement isn't really about open access. Instead, it is about collectivizing production and denying the freedom of the press from those who prefer the subscription model of scholarly publishing."—and comments:

It's the English major in me who notes the odd disconnect between the content of these two sentences and the rhetoric. We are talking about a way of publishing academic articles—not the stuff of a revolutionary, or counter-revolutionary, movement; as my kids would say, Bor-ing! But someone is invoking one of the Big Principles, "denying the freedom of the press." If the word "collectivizing" went by you, slow down and read again. Yes, the OA movement is out to deny life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. All this blather about open access

is the work of a bunch of commies who have taken over the university. I am not making this up.

Esposito nails one major issue with Beall's article: "characterize[ing] a group by its most extreme elements." Not unusual and, as he says, an easy rhetorical trick, but not really helpful. Ah, but then Esposito shows his true colors:

A good part of my disappointment in Beall's latest is that much of what he says seems to me to be correct, but simply overstated and stuffed inside a political wrapper. There are in fact predatory publishers, and Gold OA is more likely to produce them than will traditional publishing. **The traditional form of peer review seems to me to be superior to the "methodology-only" policy of PLoS ONE. The economics of Gold OA shuts out some researchers. The measure of the value of research is its value to other researchers, not the general public. And citations are the coin of the realm, which are captured in journal impact factor, not in altmetrics.** In opposing Beall's argument, I am not opposing all of it. But his outrage clouds his judgment and expression and undermines his best arguments. [Emphasis added.]

Look at the heart of that paragraph, bolded for your convenience. The first is an opinion that can't be falsified *as an opinion* (if someone says "it seems to me the Moon is made of green cheese," you can't prove that it *doesn't* seem so to them) but is otherwise arguable. The second one is *simply false* for most Gold OA journals: Free is free. The third is a nice way of pooh-poohing arguments for OA based on the need for *anybody but other researchers* to gain access to research articles. The fourth is difficult—because journal impact factors say *nothing* about article quality, only about journals.

The post is followed by 57 comments covering a wild range. If you appreciate which of the commenters are Skitcheners, there are interesting discussions going on. In the interests of focus and keeping this essay from being way too long, I won't attempt to comment on the comments (that might be another 5,000 words right there!).

Anti-OA and the Rhetoric of Reaction

Wayne Bivens-Tatum chimed in [on December 17, 2013](#) at *Academic Librarian*—and as usual his perspective is different, interesting and thought out. The lede:

You know when someone at Scholarly Kitchen thinks your [anti-open access rant is excessive](#) you've crossed some sort of threshold. You also know that when a biologist and a co-founder of the Public Library of Science bothers to give your article a [thorough fisking](#), you have people's attention. Even [Roy Tennant](#) seems a little riled, and he's usually pretty

calm. Jeffrey Beall has managed to publish an [anti-open access article](#) in an open access journal that's so poorly argued that I wonder if he'll later use the publication as an example of how bad OA publishing can be. The Beall Hoax.

All but one of those links are to items already discussed here; the Roy Tennant post deals largely with a Beall piece attacking OCLC, and by policy I don't comment on OCLC, so I didn't include Tennant's piece here. (Which does *not* mean I disagree with what Tennant's saying.)

I was going to write a detailed response pointing out, among other things, that Beall makes a number of outrageous claims about OA advocates without referring to or citing any of them. There's absolutely no evidence presented that any OA advocates hold any of the "anti-corporatist" (sic) views that Beall attributes to them, which leaves the article as an eight-page rant against a straw man. Beall claims that "a close analysis of the discourse of the OA advocates reveals that the real goal of the open access movement is to kill off the for-profit publishers and make scholarly publishing a cooperative and socialistic enterprise." Needless to say, the close analysis never comes. If it had come, this article would be a serious contribution to the OA discussion instead of an uninformative rant, especially if it had analyzed representative passages from numerous OA advocates instead of cherry-picking juicy but unrepresentative quotes from a handful of alleged zealots. **It wouldn't have proved anything against OA itself, but it might have made for a good read.** [Emphasis added.]

Consider that final sentence. I can certainly find a few OA advocates who are anti-copyright, but that doesn't even begin to suggest that OA is anti-copyright. Even if Beall had some support for his claims about *some* advocates, it wouldn't prove a thing about OA.

BT didn't do a detailed critique of the arguments because Michael Eisen did that. Instead, he looks at the rhetoric. BT quotes a paragraph from Albert O. Hirschman's book *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy*:

I have come up with another triad: that is, with three principal reactive-reactionary theses, which I call the *perversity thesis* or thesis of the perverse effect, the *futility thesis*, and the *jeopardy thesis*. According to the perversity thesis, any purposive action to improve some feature of the political, social, or economic order only serves to exacerbate the condition one wishes to remedy. The futility thesis holds that attempts at social transformation will be unavailing, that they will simply fail to "make a dent." Finally, the jeopardy thesis argues that the code of the pro-

posed chafe or reform is too high as it endangers some previous, precious accomplishment.

BT finds all three in Beall's article, and explains that; his discussion is worth reading directly. I'll quote two paragraphs that seem very much on the money, discussing three of the more outrageous sentences in Beall's piece ("Randian" refers to Ayn Rand, who BT calls a "Manichaen apocalyptic novelist often taken for a political philosopher by teenage boys"):

This makes some sense if you share a Randian worldview. In this comforting worldview, the world is a simple place to understand. It's filled not with flawed human beings acting upon a variety of motivations trying to make their way through a complex world. No, the world is made of heroes and villains. The heroes are the people who think as I do and are always right. The villains are any people who disagree with any part of my ideology. They do so not because the world is complicated and disagreement natural, but because they are evil and possibly stupid, and no matter what noble motives they might claim to have, they're lying and trying to destroy some beloved institution. Also, there's the faith that commercial enterprise is always good and free markets (if they ever really exist) always lead to the best outcome. Challenging this faith in any way leads to an extreme reaction. It's a world of extremes. Criticizing any area in which private enterprise and free markets maybe don't give us the outcomes we want is equated with being a "collectivist" who wants to bring the capitalist system down. That explains why in the article, criticism of Elsevier or of commercial science publishing means that one wants to destroy all corporations. It doesn't make a lot of sense until you look at it through the Randian lens.

In this world, people don't support open access because they think the creation and dissemination of new knowledge is a public good. They do it because they want to destroy all corporations and deny freedom to people. This must be their motive because they disagree with Beall about open access scholarship, and he thinks these things are bad, so they must be motivated by these evil ideas. Q.E.D. Since there have to be heroes and villains, Beall must be the hero and everyone who disagrees with him in the slightest a villain who is acting from evil motives to destroy everything he holds dear. Once you share this worldview, evidence doesn't matter anymore.

There's a lot more here—it's not a brief post. Go read it. I like BT's syllogistic version of part of Beall's "reasoning":

- Some OA publishing is predatory publishing.
- All predatory publishing is bad.
- Therefore, all OA publishing is bad.

Sounds about right—not, to be sure, as a valid syllogism.

Characters

This post, by the Library Loon [on December 19, 2013](#) at *Gavia Libraria*, may be the most important post in this whole section, because what the Loon's saying is true. It's so important, and so well stated, that I'm going to quote the whole post (*Gavia Libraria* operates on a CC BY license...I have to credit the pseudonymous Loon as the original author, which I of course gladly do):

The open-access movement has always had its... characters. Zealots. Kooks. Scary people. People who just Aren't Our Sort, Dearie. Any old loon can start a weblog, after all; at least one Loon has done so. For all the differences the Loon has with some of OA's other characters, she stops short of wishing them gone. It takes a certain amount of kookiness to provide energy sufficient to get anything *done* sometimes.

Moreover, engaging publicly with kookery is often a fool's game, at best analogous to teaching pigs Mozart arias, at worst lending kooks credibility they do not deserve and should not be permitted to have. So OA tolerates its kooks, usually with kindness, sometimes with a politely blind eye or deaf ear... and that is largely as it should be.

Why did OA let Beall get away with his act so long? no one has yet asked, probably because the answer the Loon has just given is so patently obvious to those in the movement as not to need saying. (If the Loon had to characterize the attitude of those in the OA movement who noted Beall's deep-seated antipathy toward OA months or even years previously—evidence was available for the persistent and perceptive—she would say it was "oh, him, he'll blow himself up someday." As, in fact, he has.) Nonetheless, there is a lesson in this that the movement could do with taking to heart: *do not let your enemy control a visible, high-mindshare product or service in your space.*

If not for Beall's list, Beall would never have been anything but another easily-ignorable kook. If a suitable group of individuals, or an organization, had taken on [the job of publicly calling out bad practice](#), Beall would have sunk back into easily-ignorable kookdom. Instead, we have... this, whatever this is; "embarrassing evitable mess" is the Loon's first instinctive characterization.

The Loon will mercilessly mock and possibly savage any commenter waltzing in here with "oh, well, nobody actually believed Beall; he had no real influence." [That is arrant nonsense](#), and the greatest pity is that it is arrant nonsense spouted by those

most deeply steeped in the OA movement and most desirous of its success.

If the above paragraph describes you, the Loon loves you dearly—you know she does!—but must remind you that *people like you are so few as to be fringe still*. It often does not feel so on Twitter, true, but academic Twitter itself is a rounding error compared to all of academe. You *cannot* measure what academe understands by what you understand, nor how academe gets its news by how you do. (You use a feedreader? You digitally-brainwashed solutionist kook, you.)

In the Loon's prior professional world, Beall's list was an enormously valuable convenience, and because of that, Beall himself enjoyed considerable credibility, such that his least pronouncement was freely email-forwarded everywhere. Every now and then this was plainly passive aggression against the Loon herself (she has mentioned how deeply her prior workplace loathed her and all her works, correct?), but by and large, it was ignorance crossed with homophily among librarians to whom OA and its advocates felt like a threat. The Loon's workplace was no sort of outlier—well, except insofar as many, many academic libraries still boast insufficient knowledge of or interest in OA to bother forwarding communiqués about it.

Those OA advocates who wonder why libraries are not more active in the OA movement need wonder no more. The Loon boggles particularly at one currently-circulating notion that academic libraries will just take over scholarly publishing wholesale. Not in an environment where Beall's frothings circulate as freely as water churned up by migrating flocks of waterfowl!

Fortunately, the Loon can't think of any other major OA showpiece services run by OA's enemies. (OA and hybrid journals at toll-access publishers are insufficiently influential to count at this juncture.) We can at least hope that an analogous situation will not arise again. If it does, though, let us *please* intervene earlier. Keep what is valuable about such services by all means, but let us not allow their proprietors to fuel further apathy and anti-OA agitation.

I quoted that in its entirety because I suspect most readers don't click through on most links—and because it's relatively short. I wish I could say “yes, but...” but I can't: There's simply too much evidence, *even now*, that Beall's held in high regard and OA is viewed suspiciously—not only among academics but among too many librarians and even library journalists.

I *will* disagree with something the Loon says—although in a response to a comment, not in the

piece itself: “If academe had found him out, he would have quickly been laughed to scorn (as has now happened).” Unfortunately, as such examples as a January 2014 link from *ALA Direct* to the latest Beall's List demonstrates, the scorn hasn't happened *effectively*.

The first link is to [Distraction Watch](#), a community archive of strange emails from probably-sketchy publishers. It's no substitute for stronger action from OASPA and others, but it's an interesting piece of the puzzle.

Coping with Sketchy Journals and Publishers

In case it isn't abundantly clear: Saying that Beall is a sad case and that his work can't be trusted at this point is *not* saying there aren't sketchy journals and publishers. Of course there are—and the discussion of sketchy cases works a lot better if you omit a certain two-letter abbreviation before “journals and publishers.”

Sketchy publishers produce phony journals to please certain companies, consisting entirely of duplicated articles (from other journals) that support the aims of those companies but with journal names seeming to imply more. Sketchy publishers produce journals publishing research in fields that have no plausible scientific basis for existing. Sketchy publishers publish whole sets of articles in more than one journal without saying so. Sketchy publishers introduce new journals like crazy because they know that the journals will yield revenue, even those that never have any significant number of legitimate articles. Here's one thing about this list: the examples I'm thinking of involve respectable *subscription* publishers, not OA publishers.

I have never seen serious refutation of the maxim that peer review does not determine *whether* a paper will be published, only *where* it will be published—and that maxim's a lot older than OA. Think there isn't a fifth-tier traditional journal that will publish an article that *PLOS One* reviewers reject out of hand? Think again.

Should we condemn all traditional publishing because there are sketchy examples? No? Well, then, should we assault traditional publishers because they seem to be based in a certain country? Probably not. Nor should we do so for OA journals and publishers.

I strongly suspect that *PLOS One* published more articles in 2013 than all of the truly sketchy APC-charging Gold OA publishers combined—

because those publishers tend to have large numbers of “journals” (which is to say, ISSNs, titles and maybe web pages) but very few actual articles. Relatively few anti-OA folks are prone to attack *PLOS One* as publishing bad science (although a few pro-OA folks, including myself, think *PLOS One*’s article processing charges should be a whole lot lower).

How do you (as a librarian, a reader, a potential author) spot sketchy journals and publishers? Here’s one set of suggestions from a highly reputable if pseudonymous source:

Assessing the scamminess of a purported open-access publisher

This [April 11, 2012 post](#) by Library Loon at *Gavia Libraria* uses OA in the title—but I think the Loon’s suggestions apply equally well to subscription-access publishers and journals. What the Loon is saying is important and well-stated, so I’m quoting the whole thing except the introductory paragraphs. These are “the heuristics [the Loon] uses to assess...publishers”:

Communications practices

- Is their website competently designed and functional? If not, assume a scammer. (Caveat: Many Open Journal Systems sites are remarkably ugly, but still belong to reputable efforts.)
- Are they sending out mass emails asking for editors and submissions? Often a sign of a scammer (though, it must be said, a couple of legitimate OA publishers have done this; they shouldn’t, and Hindawi at least has ceased the practice). Is the subject matter of the journal(s) advertised in the email appropriate to the recipient? If not, assume a scammer.
- Are they sending out mass emails asking for links to their journal website? Scammer, just like any other linkbaiter.
- Are they in [the Directory of Open Access Journals](#)? Nota bene, if they are, it doesn’t automatically mean they’re legitimate; the DOAJ doesn’t check closely. But if they’re not, it’s worrisome.
- Does the publisher offer usage statistics or any other sort of metric, alternative or otherwise? (Don’t bother checking for impact factor; they won’t have one. Not having one isn’t a sign of anything but newness, anyway; it doesn’t tell you anything useful.)

The publisher’s stable

- Is the journal stable in a coherent discipline or set of disciplines? If not—if the stable ranges all over the map, and this is a young/unknown publisher—assume a scammer. PLoS, BMC,

Hindawi—the legitms tend to start disciplinarily small and expand (if they expand) outward. (The likes of *PLoS ONE* are an exception, of course, but the Loon has yet to see a scammy publisher try a *PLoS ONE* clone.)

- Anything set your alarm bells ringing? The Loon has seen comically misspelled journal titles once or twice, as well as ludicrous journal mission statements. (Hey, “Scientific & Academic Publishing”? It’s [Geographic Information Systems](#), just so you know.)
- Check journal-launch dates. Did the publisher launch a flock of journals at once? This is logistically near-impossible to do well (or indeed at all), no matter what the underlying business model; assume a scammer.
- Likewise, are many of the journals empty shells, with no or very few published articles? Classic scammy sign; the publisher is throwing spaghetti at the wall to see what sticks.
- How many of the journals publish regularly? The lower the number (that is, the more irregular the journal schedules), the likelier this publisher is to be a scammer.
- A particularly dangerous warning sign: the publisher issues a lot of “edited volumes” rather than actual journals. This is really only a somewhat more advanced case of rot than the irregularly-published journal. The scammer has given up on collecting enough victims to publish something that looks even vaguely like a journal.

Often, the above criteria combine into a fairly strong hunch about the publisher’s scamminess. Those still unsure about a particular publisher may wish to proceed to:

Production values

- Download a journal article or two. Assess the writing quality. Assess the copyediting. Assess the typesetting quality. If any of these is markedly lacking, spot-check a few more articles, varying the journals you look at. This isn’t an infallible sign, because goodness knows plenty of publishers on all sides of the business-model question let howling typographic and content horrors pass (the Loon is looking at you, Haworth), and a few scammers are smart enough to have fixed their typography and layout (the Loon is looking at you, InTech), but a pronounced lack is still indicative.
- If you have the disciplinary background, skim some tables of contents to check articles for currency, interest, worth. The Loon confesses that this is quite often beyond her; she typically asks a liaison-librarian colleague with appropriate ex-

expertise for his or her opinion. When she looks at scammy journals within her expertise domains, though, she typically sees work that's years behind the state of the art, even considering the slow pace of normal scholarly publishing.

- Does this publisher have anything on its site about its digital-preservation practices? Are they a LOCKSS, CLOCKSS, or Portico member? Do they participate in the DOAJ's OA-journal preservation program? Are they partnering with a library for preservation? This is a basic scholarly responsibility; a publisher that hasn't considered it is either a scammer or a bunch of irresponsible heads-in-the-sand ostriches.

People

- Are editorial boards listed? If not, assume a scammer. If so, have you heard of any of these people? Again, the Loon often has to defer to others' disciplinary knowledge here.
- This is a tricky and often misleading one, but: do editorial and author slates consist mostly or entirely of scholars from developing nations? [Richard Poynder explains astutely](#) why this is a scamminess indicator: the developing educational/research infrastructure in these countries often privileges the *appearance* of scholarly publishing over the actual quality thereof, leaving a huge market for scammy pay-to-play "publishing" outfits. *Do not* use this criterion by itself! Not a few developing nations are building wholly legitimate open-access journal stables, in part because developed-world scholarly publishers often can't be arsed to publish knowledge local to developing nations or work with non-native speakers of English on their prose—and more shame to them for it.

Business model

- Has the publisher ever had any financial support at all other than author fees? Grants (including grants that have run their course; several reputable OA publishers have gotten their seed money via startup grants), an existing reputable publisher applying capital, a membership program, an institutional or library or grant-funder backstop? If not, that's a worrisome sign.
- If there's advertising, is it reputable, relevant to the journals, not immediately skeevey?
- Does the publisher run conferences? Are they exclusively in exotic junkety locations? Are the conference fees exorbitant, compared to other conferences in the field? Do they publish proceedings, and if they do, are those proceedings any good? Just as there are scammy journals, there are scammy conferences that are pure excuses for expensive vacations and profitmongering.

The Loon asked what criteria she may have missed. The first comment stresses the editorial board—and specifically, if there's a question, *contacting* somebody on the editorial board to make sure that they're actually on the board and aware of the journal. Another, from Molly Keener, adds four more criteria:

- look for a copyright date on the website: if it's out of date (and it's not early Jan.), be wary
- look at the web address: if it seems odd (e.g., <http://www.ijhssnet.com> – why the "net"?), be wary
- look at the frequency of publication (flip of the Loon's): if it publishes regularly, but with bloated issues, be wary; and related, if there has been at least one special issue in the first six months of publication, be wary
- if there is an announcement that the article processing fee has risen significantly (e.g., from \$20 to \$200) within the first year of publication, be wary

The Loon notes that some reputable new journals *do* choose to "start off with a bang via a themed issue," so the third bullet's a little tricky. The first, second and fourth all seem useful. (Kenner clarifies the point: "I should have clarified that an issue that is named a "special issue" but seemingly has no difference in theme, length, scope, etc. than standard issues is suspect.")

Not unique to OA, probably not the majority of OA Sketchy journals aren't unique to open access; there are and have been sketchy journals that are subscription access. Sketchy journals may represent a small fraction of actual OA publishing—that is, there may be a lot of "journals" that never publish any significant number of papers, at least if scholars take the time to do some due diligence as suggested by the Loon and others.

Would it be nice if there were an authoritative and reliable list of Publishers and Journals To Be Avoided? Yes—and such a list would inherently be suspect if it only included gold OA journals with article processing charges. Is it plausible for one librarian who clearly regards OA as unnecessary and OA advocates as bad people to maintain such a list? I think the answer is obvious.

I believe we'll see the [Directory of Open Access Journals](#) start to delist suspicious journals—but maybe not, as that's not clearly DOAJ's job. I hope we'll start to see some serious work from the [Open Access Scholarly Publishers Association](#) (OASPA) in this area, and maybe we're seeing [some useful work](#),

but OASPA is quite clear about *not* maintaining lists of sketchy journals or publishers.

Can you identify the Bad Guys by conducting stings? That's another essay for another time.

The Middle

Forecasts and Futurism

Having apparently skipped these two topics last year, I'll do a combined set—a few short-term predictions (forecasts) and longer-term predictions (futurism) that I found interesting, leaving out most library-related items and including some items *about* futurism and predictions.

Thinking about Predictions

Why trends bend

Richard Watson posted this [on May 16, 2012](#) at *What's Next: Top Trends*. It's not a forecast or a set of forecasts; it's a thoughtful discussion of why the future isn't all that predictable, and was originally written as the conclusion to Watson's latest futurist book. Excerpts:

Ideas can be tricky in the sense that they often combine in novel and unexpected ways. Thus, the future rarely ends up as a logical extension of our current thinking. Some ideas will move much faster, or much slower, than we expect, either because we will underestimate the speed of technological change or because we will forget about the impact of human psychology and the inertia of history. This latter point is hugely important. Futurists, especially techno-optimists, often focus on technology at the expense of other important factors, especially the psychology of their fellow human beings, many of whom can be emotional, subjective, irrational, forgetful and stark raving mad...

We might also find that many of our new ideas, especially major scientific and technological breakthroughs that would benefit mankind, are constrained, modified or rejected by large numbers of people in favour of illogical beliefs and superstitions. Rather than a new enlightenment, we may enter a new dark age where it is illogical beliefs, rather than facts, that flourish. Again, you might believe that this future is implausible, but it's already happening in some regions where the teaching of evolution is being rejected, either in favour of the balanced teaching of various viewpoints, or because religion considers such ideas to be dangerous and subversive...

It would also be a mistake to assume that the future will be a singular experience. Some people will experience the future sooner than others, which is much

the same as saying that how you experience the future, 5, 15 or 50 years hence, will to a large degree, depend upon what age you are, where you live and what you spend your time doing. There is also the point made about prophesy by the philosopher Karl Popper many years ago, which is that the future is dependent upon the growth of knowledge, which is itself unknowable or, at the very least, unpredictable.

To conclude, the only thing that we really know about the future is that it will be different. Nothing is inevitable and equally nothing will happen in isolation.

Overall, the future offers us many wonderful possibilities, but it remains up to us whether the opportunities are embraced, squandered or ignored. The future is already here, but it's unclear what we'll decide to do with it.

What I don't see in this essay but *occasionally* see in some of Watson's other writing: Recognition that "*the future*" is generally the wrong term when it comes to any specific area, including, say, media: it's a *set* of futures. So, for example, I don't believe the question ever was "When will ebooks replace print books?" any more than it should be "When will streaming replace purchased music?" because both questions presume a single future that's unlikely. The question "What percentage of books will be ebooks in 20XX?" is more interesting and more meaningful. ("Will the market for purchased music in physical form become so small as to be untenable?"—which could otherwise be "When will CDs and vinyl finally die?"—is a workable question, but not the one that gets asked. The fundamental weakness of most deathwatches is that they assume that a shrinking market share automatically means total disappearance. Know what happens if a field shrinks by 5% a year? After 20 years, it's not only not gone entirely, there's still more than a third of it left.)

Big Things Ahead...But Keep Your Shirt On

This piece, by Matt Novak [on May 25, 2012](#) at *Smithsonian.com*, is about futures past—specifically, an article in the October 1944 *Science and Mechanics* by John Silence with the same title as this blog post.

What makes this article so fascinating is that it looks at the advances of the future with optimism, but tempers that rosey outlook with realistic predictions. There were a number of stories in the early 1940s offering American readers a vision of the future after the war, but this is one of the few that asks people to keep their expectations in check. The article opens with the common assumptions of the day about the futuristic post-war world Americans would be living in...

I'm not going to quote much of this (quoting the earlier article) because it's a good read and you can read it yourself. But you can guess the overall tone: naturally, futurists were saying that, shortly after WWII, people would be living in smart homes with all sorts of technological marvels—but, this writer says, you shouldn't get your hopes up too much. From the 1944 article:

For many reasons, we aren't going to turn things upside down as soon as the last shot is fired in this conflict. The people who risk their money to provide the things you buy are going to hold back to find out if you'll take it before they plunge too deep. And all their research may be overruled on appeal.

The excerpts from the earlier article, including Silence's cautionary notes, are quite interesting—including his prediction that advances in medicine would draw less attention but might be especially influential (remember: penicillin was just *beginning* to become available in 1944).

I wasn't aware that 1944 pundits were projecting a postwar future with personal helicopters as flying cars, but Silence does a good job of pointing out why that probably wasn't going to happen.

All in all, a good read and a bracing reality check.

Three Years of Loonacy

I have a cluster of items by the Library Loon at *Gavia Libraria*, recounting the success of her 2012 forecasts, offering 2013 forecasts, recounting the success of those and offering 2014 forecasts. Since I quoted most of the 2012 predictions verbatim in the [June 2012 Cites & Insights](#), it only seems reasonable to follow up with this sequence.

Recapitulating 2012

This item, by the Library Loon [on November 27, 2012](#) at *Gavia Libraria*, could go in a Library Futurism piece, but it's not entirely about library-specific issues—and it's short-term forecasts, not futurism. Here the Loon is doing the honorable practice few other forecasters follow: Seeing how they've done at the end of the year.

I didn't take issue with most of the Loon's 2012 predictions, which is *really* unusual for a disagreeable cuss like me. (I added glosses on several predictions, but never flatly disagreed.)

She grouped predictions into likely flashpoints, “grinding slow but exceeding fine,” perhapses and “anything could happen and probably will.”

So how'd she do?

Likely flashpoints: She was predicting, or hoping that a “really Big Deal” would explode—and I honestly missed the one that did, beyond the SUNY Potsdam ACS deal. To wit, the Canadian Research Knowledge Network announced that it would [shut down its national Big Deal](#) with ACS and explained its reasoning clearly (see the link). That's 75 institutions. She also anticipated a demand for transparency about job placement rates at library schools, and that hasn't been strong so far. Finally, she expected the worst from Maria Pallante (Copyright Registrar)—and so far that hadn't happened.

The second category—**slow but fine**—was all hits, and all to the good. In “perhapses,” the Loon anticipated one OA megajournal folding, which didn't happen, and thought the “silent war between MLSes and underemployed postdocs” for library positions might come to a head—which also hasn't happened.

Finally, there are the things the Loon **wasn't willing to call one way or the other**—and here “full credit” may not mean much. She's surely right about the final shape of Google Books still being impossible to determine. A good recall piece, worth noting. And it leads naturally into:

Anticipating 2013

The Loon again, this time on [December 1, 2012](#) at *Gavia Libraria*. Last time around, I quoted almost the entire piece; this time, I'll point you to the original and just give the actual predictions (sometimes in my own briefer wording) and, if relevant, [my take in square brackets], omitting some that seem beyond C&I scope.

- **Near-certainties:** Pro-toll access arguments will be nibbled to death by ~~Loons~~ carve-outs. {You *must* read the original to make sense of this.} Single-discipline toll-access publishers will find their bundled subscription deals under increasing siege. [E.g., even more ACS Big Deal breakdowns and similar cases.] (She thinks it will be longer before the Big Pigs see Big Deal breakdowns.) The NIH will see a brief flare-up of agitation over the Public Access Policy. [But, she says, the objectors will be “ignorant and obnoxious enough not to pose a serious threat to the policy.”]
- **Perhapses:** Real legislative progress on copyright reform. [The Loon defines real progress at getting a broad reform bill *into committee*, not actually approved or even debated on the floor.] Another big U.S. government OA policy. NSF gets stricter about data-sharing re-

quirements. An OA megajournal from 2011 folds (she thinks SAGE Open is likeliest—but that this could happen as late as 2015.)

- **Who knows?** *Wiley v. Kirtsaeng* (the suit relating to first-sale rights on imported books). [Fortunately, first sale won.] Big Deal e-textbook situations in higher ed. Google Books legal mess. Public library ebook lending. [The Loon expected “lots of posturing and zero progress.”]

In the waning days of 2013

The Loon’s recapitulation of how she did, [on December 12, 2013](#)—and it wasn’t as strong a year as 2012.

- **Near-certainties:** The access carveouts didn’t amount to much. Big Deal problems had more to do with SAGE than with single-discipline publishers. The NIH flareup didn’t happen: a case where the Loon’s only too happy to be wrong.
- **Perhapses:** Wrong on three, right on more government agencies announcing OA policies.
- **Who knows?** Since she didn’t call these one way or the other, she just comments on results—to wit, *Wiley V. Kirtsaeng* “could not have been improved upon,” e-textbook Big Deals aren’t doing well, Google Books made the Authors Guild look stupid (but AG soldiers on in its hapless quest)...and she didn’t see much progress on public library ebook lending.

The Loon had a down year compared to 2012—but that’s partly because she had a stellar year in 2012 and partly because some things turned out more positively than she’d expected.

Anticipating 2014

Finally, [this December 21, 2013 post](#) gives the Loon’s predictions for 2014. And here, because these are reasonably fresh predictions—some of them fairly strong—I’m going to quote them at greater length, with [my comments if any in square brackets,] but I’m leaving out a couple having to do with library schools (not a C&I battle), one Canadian one where I lack any knowledge, and one—about “kyriarchy”—where it strikes me I can’t possibly comment and don’t understand the topic very well. Sorry about that; you can, of course, go to the original.

No-brainers

- *Continued clashes between toll-access publishers and faculty-as-authors.* This is an irresistible-force-meets-immovable-object problem... [Seems likely, esp. as Elsevier tries to stomp on existing practice

using, of all things, DMCA as its weapon of choice.]

- *Federal agencies will announce their OSTP Memo responses, sparking an immense wave of confusion, backlash, and flailing.* Responses will be neither uniform nor simple to follow; researchers who receive support from more than one agency will be particularly upset by this... [I’m a little more optimistic, but that’s probably naive.]

Perhapses

- *A Research I university in the US or Canada will cancel a really big Big Deal... quite possibly in full glare of public view.* The Loon has two likely candidates in mind, but these things typically come out of left field, so she isn’t wedded to those two... [One can only hope—if not this year, then next?]
- *One of the larger parasitic open-access-journal faux-publishers, finally feeling the heat, will fold.* More than one would be nice. [Would anyone notice? Some of these “publishers” don’t seem to actually publish much of anything...]
- *AHA and OAH will backpedal all the way back to start.* The Loon isn’t entirely confident about this, but she was pleasantly surprised to see AHA backpedaling at all, so she’ll take a flyer.

Who knows? Not this Loon

- *The Georgia State appeal.* Worrisome noises are coming from that courtroom...
- *The Trade Pacific Partnership.* The copyright lobby has decided that international treaties are its best bet. That may well be correct. [The use of treaties to accomplish what Congress wouldn’t otherwise do isn’t new, but seems worse than usual this time.]
- *Digital privacy.* The Loon hopes the engineers can stay ahead of the shills and spooks. She hopes they want to.

The Loon closes with “May 2014’s surprises be kind ones.” I’ll second that.

2013 Predictions and Results

Coupled when that’s easy, not when it’s hard. No special order.

2013: Hello. Goodbye.

This [December 19, 2012 post](#) by Richard Watson at *What’s Next: Future Trends* begins with a “quick visual summary” of things Watson and his colleague Ross Dawson saw as “appearing and disappearing in our lives in 2013.” It’s followed by the list in text form.

Note that these were *near-term predictions*—“appearing” presumably means some *significant* adoption, and “disappearing” should, I would as-

sume, mean *substantial* abandonment. (I suppose that a field declining by, say, 5% *could* be considered “disappearing,” but that’s really stretching the point.) It’s the kind of list I just love to make fun of, and given that Watson has previously issued long-term futurist forecasts that, for example, had libraries *extinct* by 2019 (a prediction he later publicly repented), landline telephones extinct by 2011 and newspaper delivery extinct by 2012, he’s in that odd position of going overboard even as he sometimes criticizes going overboard.

Consider a few of them (where I have either an opinion or some knowledge). My comments in [square brackets]:

- **Appearing:** Augmented reality glasses [yes, in limited quantities]; thought control [wha?]; personal DNA testing [yes...but the medical as opposed to genealogical variety came to a rapid halt]; digital butlers [huh?]; voice control TV [yes, although reports on performance vary]; pay by fingerprint [apparently]; electric sports cars [wasn’t the Tesla sports car already out in 2012?]; robot sex [wha?]; empathic robots {not that I’ve heard}; gesture interfaces [*most certainly* out in 2012 or before—unless he means something way beyond the iPad and Android tablets]; flexible, foldable mobile phones [foldable mobile phones have been around for a decade or so; flexible—well, are they?]; infinite color at home [I have no idea what that could even mean, but yes, there’s nothing that prevents you from having any color in the home]; personalized billboards [if he means those awful LED things that change messages depending on what FM station the nearest car’s receiving—a crude form of personalization and already out in 2012]; pollution absorbing clothes [really?]; memory implants [not that I’ve heard of, or maybe I’ve just forgotten]; video wallpaper [no]; retail delivery boxes [mostly attempted and failed].
- **Disappearing:** Intimacy [oh give me a break]; computer mouse [not really]; spelling [fortunately, not entirely]; landline telephones [diminishing, yes; disappearing, no]; coins [really? where?]; privacy [dystopian but partly right]; video rental stores [that one’s basically right]; vacuuming [in what world?]; retirement [bull]; weekday newspapers [I’d pretty much guarantee there weren’t even 10% fewer weekday papers in January 2014 than in January 2013]; CDs/DVDs [maybe fewer, but this is

wildly overstated]; space tourism [how on earth could this “disappear”?]; 8 hours sleep [fortunately, not true]; switching off [if anything, it’s a growing trend]; biodiversity [what a terribly dystopian prediction!]; non-internet businesses [bye-bye, restaurants, car dealers, supermarkets, airlines, plumbers...but not absurd predictions]; welfare state [really? disappearing? where?]; watches for under 25s [while this may have seemed plausible, it’s not what I’m seeing]; maps; shame.

Unless Watson’s just being deliberately provocative or redefining “disappearing” in a very odd way, this is a pathetic list—including a few I didn’t bother to include. Of course, it lacks the expansions that you’d probably have to buy his book for, but it’s a prime example of why I make fun of futurists. It would work very well in *Wired*, especially the “disappearing” list, since I really do believe that *Wired* equates a 5% drop in sales with *total extinction*. Especially if something isn’t digital.

I don’t see any end-of-year post either claiming success or admitting failure on these, but that doesn’t surprise me: Watson usually seems better at throwing out assured projections than on owning up to his own track record.

Just to reiterate a few of the most extreme cases of what Richard Watson expected to be substantially *disappearing* in 2013:

Vacuuming. This one doesn’t even make any sense to me, to be honest. What? You just let the carpets get dirtier and dirtier until you call in a company to steam-clean them?

Non-internet businesses. Even if Watson actually means “businesses that lack web pages,” he’s wrong: Many local tradesmen and neighborhood restaurants get by just fine without web pages—and, of course, having a web page doesn’t make you an internet business. I don’t see restaurants, car dealers, railroads, airlines, supermarkets, plumbers, electricians, appliance stores...oh, the list goes on...disappearing in my lifetime, much less in 2013. If they did, I’m not sure the nation could ever recover from the resulting depression and mass joblessness, food riots, etc., etc.

Weekday newspapers. A few disappeared. Most did not. While total weekday U.S. newspapers have dropped in the U.S. from around 1,600 in 1990 to around 1,350 now, that’s a slow decline—and until recently, it was a case of evening newspapers shutting down and (fewer) morning newspapers emerging. Fact is, the number of newspapers shutting down

weekday editions is so small compared to the overall number that I couldn't even find a direct source. The best sources I did find say that around 14 to 21 daily newspapers seem to shut down in a given year; so let's call it "probably 1% to 1.5%." An odd form of disappearance, that—it allows for another 60 to 100 years before they're actually gone, assuming an absurd straight-line projection of 14 to 21.

Computer mouse. Sure, that's disappeared, just as nobody uses desktop computers any more. Oh, wait... And, of course, this is why neither Logitech nor Microsoft still produces high-quality mice... Oh, wait again... What you *can* say: the computer mouse is declining in terms of *percentage of computing devices for which it is the pointing device*. That's true. That's not disappearance.

Those are examples of why this kind of list is mostly dystopian nonsense, but I guess it keeps futurists employed.

What we'll see in 2013 in digital media

Posted [December 11, 2012](#) at *GigaOm*, with the author listed as "paidContent." It's part of a whole set of short-term forecasts. Some of the forecasts (without their discussion and with my [bracketed comments as appropriate]):

- Remaining book publishers will settle with the DOJ in the ebook pricing lawsuit. [This happened, didn't it?]
- A well-known figure will turn down a seven-figure deal to self-publish. [I don't remember anything quite that dramatic.]
- Barnes & Noble will drastically cut back its Nook product line. [There are four Nooks at this point, which seems like a fairly broad selection, but "drastically" is one of those words...]
- Innovative ads take off as brands move dollars from cable to online. [If "innovative" means "annoying changing ads in the sidebar at GigaOm," maybe so, but I sure haven't seen much clever or creative.]
- BuzzFeed will earn a Pulitzer prize. [*Rigghht!*. No nominations, no prizes.]
- Branded content will re-fuel media. [I'm including this for the sheer wonderment of that sentence. I'm not *quite* sure what it means in English, but I think it's about how terrific it will be when all media are all advertorials—when *Fast Company* is the model for editorial integrity. Pfeh.]
- Online video will eat TV. [Not really.]

- Xmas will be exciting. [No comment.]
- More newspaper chains will file for bankruptcy because of legacy costs. [I think I found one that wasn't already preparing a packaged bankruptcy in 2012. I suppose one is more than zero.]

There were a few others. I guess the lack of anything particularly startling or major is a good sign, although the BuzzFeed prediction is, well, pushing improbability pretty hard.

Predictions for 2013

After taking a year off, Ed Felten and the *Freedom to Tinker* gang were back with [this January 7, 2013 post](#). And as usual, there are quite a few short-term predictions here: 21 in all, too many to list. Also as usual, the first and most assured one: "DRM technology will still fail to prevent widespread infringement. In a related development, pigs will still fail to fly."

Felten's group tends toward negative predictions as well as positive ones—so, for example, the second one: The FAA *won't* reverse the ban on using electronic devices during takeoff and landing. A few others, in abbreviated/rephrased form and generally without commentary:

- A self-driving vehicle will be involved in a fatal accident (causing a huge backlash). [Fortunately, didn't happen.]
- An unexpected solar event will take out one or more GPS satellites or other important space infrastructure... [I don't believe this happened.]
- No real solution for smartphone patent wars.
- An online-only show will get support for an Emmy nomination, but is ruled ineligible. {What *did* happen: Netflix-only shows, which news reports tended to call "online-only," were nominated, *not* ruled ineligible...and won.}
- More growth in MOOCs, some consolidation, growth of nonprofit platforms.

A fair number of these are detailed and out of scope for C&I. This group usually does a "how we did" post roughly a year later; so far, I haven't seen one for 2013—or a new set of predictions for 2014.

Looking Back...

What 1967 Thought 2001 Would Look Like

As a little break in current futurism, this *Mental Floss* piece by Chris Higgins appeared on *February 4, 2013*.

It's mostly based on *The 21st Century*, a Walter Cronkite special aired on CBS on March 12, 1967.

This piece is actually fairly short, linking to a *Smithsonian* writeup that...well, the link doesn't work when I try it. Too bad; it might be fun to explore. Here's Higgins' lead paragraph:

Walter Cronkite, 1967, sitting in the living room of the Home of the 21st Century: "We could watch a football game, or a movie, shown in full color on our big 3D color screen. The sound would come from these globe-like speakers." His vision is reasonably correct, though the football game I watched yesterday wasn't in 3D, nor do my speakers look like globes. But conceptually it's spot-on -- right down to the ability for me to select what program I want to watch from a console. Granted, the console is an assemblage of remote controls and apps rather than a bunch of unlabeled dials, but still.

There *are* globe speakers on the market, including fairly expensive ones with good reputations, such as Cabasse's \$150,000 system, but the huge console to control a TV was not, fortunately, how things turned out. And, of course, while many of us *own* big 3D color screens, most of us don't much give a damn about the 3D aspect.

Of the few other items Higgins quoted from the longer discussion, one stands out: "we might find ourselves in a glass enclosure where the lint and dirt we've accumulated during our trip is removed electrostatically." Or not.

As to the shape of entertainment centers and the like...well, the 1967 show was based on corporate "home of the future" concepts, and those corporations were actively working to make those ideas come to fruition. As at least one commenter pointed out, there's one critical thing that almost nobody foresaw before it happened: the miniaturization that came about thanks to integrated circuits and what it would mean.

2014 Predictions

We begin with a disappointment, one where I thought I had both 2013 and 2014-and-beyond projections—that, thanks to an odd linking system, turned into one set of projections so full of caveats that I'm not giving the details.

The Future Is Not a Destination

That's *Slate's* title for [this October 2, 2013](#) piece by Patrick Tucker—but it's really a *Futurist* top 10 "for 2014 and beyond" piece with added paragraphs about *why* the forecasts are in the top 10 and some additional comments as to why they might or might not happen. A little confusion on my part—because as I was writing this piece, I included a *Futurist* list

in my 2013 predictions, and these seemed awfully familiar. Turns out the *Futurist* link was not only undated, it went directly to *the current set of predictions*, whatever those might be. Scratch one section of the 2013 discussion!

So instead of two lists that I thought would be fun to compare, we have one—and "and beyond" is just one of the caveats that makes this really *not* a set of short-term forecasts.

Looking through the list again, it includes so many detailed sets of reasons why these odd forecasts might be entirely offbase that I'm not going to summarize them. To my mind, the silliest one is the suggestion that we (all of us?) are going to stop buying and owning, and start renting everything—and the discussion behind that seems to say that true futurists are generally agreed that U.S. unemployment would remain above 6.5% through the end of 2015. So, you know, go read the article and see if you find it any more convincing than I do.

Top Travel Trends

Richard Watson posted this [on October 9, 2013](#) at *What's Next*. Examples from this post:

- **Ubiquitous connectivity.** Here's the lede: "In the future **everyone's** life will be carried around with them in the palm of the hand, on their wrist or in other wearable devices. **Access to information will define social status and identity** and personal technology will be an ever-present companion—at home and on holiday." [Emphasis added.] As long as "in the future" is however far out you want to make it, it's tough to disprove that nonsense, but it's gonna be a while before (a) everybody in every nation, no matter how poor, can afford or will wish to deal with this, (b) *everyone* does it, (c) "social status" has nothing to do with wealth or worth, only with "access to information." Which, at that point, would seem pretty ubiquitous, so I guess there will be no status distinctions? Anyway, later in the discussion he reveals his *true* expectation: "Ultimately, it is likely that micro-technology will be embedded inside us, with the human body becoming a future computer interface." Fortunately, I'll be dead long before we're forced to be chipped.
- **Personalization.** "In the future, the personalization of everything will be the norm." *Everything*—presumably including the food you eat and the water you drink. We'll all be able to "express our individuality in every facet of

our lives.” [Gee, that organic navel orange looks good, but it’s not personalized...]

- **Flexibility.** The jargon in this description is breathtaking, including the “rental economy” and “modular cars” and “zero-hours” workplaces and...
- **Premiumisation.** Huh? Another jargonfest, and “we” (everybody?) will pay to “upgrade **everything**.” Everybody pays for scarcity and rareness, thus making such things...not scarce and not rare. Never mind.

There are a couple of predictions here that might make sense—e.g., some people want to expand their horizons through travel (always been true, so why wouldn’t it be true in the future), some people want to simplify their life on holiday (and Watson says people “may be prepared to pay to be deprived of technology,” I guess because actually *disconnecting and turning off* is impossible unless you pay for it). Then there’s the final trend, and it makes me sad to see where Watson’s really at. I’ll quote it in full:

- **Sustainability.** “Only joking. Despite millions being poured into everything from towel re-use schemes to airline miles offsets, most customers, it seems, really couldn’t care less.”

Sigh.

Turns out that’s just the broad-brush picture; he did a series of at least ten more “future of travel” posts that seem to have more to do with travel. I’d tagged several of them (the 10th seems to be a rehash of the list above, omitting the last one), but looking at them now I find that a little bit of Watson goes a long way. Most projections now seem to be for 2030, by which point he will presumably have gone on to greater things. Will I have an embedded communications/computing device in 2030 (yes, I expect to be around then—I’d only be 84, after all)? I strongly doubt it, unless they somehow become mandatory—and I even more strongly doubt *that*. Will people’s social status be determined entirely or in large part by their access to information? Bwahahahaha...*librarians rule!*

Seven predictions for media in 2014

Bill Cromwell [on December 20, 2013](#) at *media life*—and it’s worth noting that this online magazine is explicitly “for media planners and buyers,” which is to say It’s All About the Money. Thus, the “media economy” might better be called “the ad-supported media economy.” (Which, if you leave out books, sound recordings, movies, public broadcasting, theater, opera, ballet, symphony, sculpture and some

magazines, is “media.”) That said, here’s the list with [my comments] but without full expansion.

- **Netflix becomes available on cable.** [I suspect Comcast Owns Everything will make this less likely.]
- **Upfront deals are done on C7.** [If you even understand that prediction, you’re probably in the “media economy” itself. It’s saying that advance advertising buys in TV are likely to take into account the first full week of DVR playback as part of TV show ratings. You thought broadcast/cable TV was dead? Guess again: it’s still a huge ad market.]
- **A celebrity magazine folds.** [With a dozen such magazines—including one added just last fall—this seems likely. Print magazines are going to survive, but a given specialty can only have so many competitors before it gets silly.]
- **Instagram advertising takes off.** [What? You didn’t think you’d see your Instagram streams increasingly polluted with ads? You do know who owns Instagram, don’t you? Facebook has never seen a venue it can’t shove more ads into.]
- **Tablets hit 50 percent penetration.** [Which the writer points up as meaning Huge Opportunities for iPad-specific Ads, of course.]
- **Big changes in newspaper delivery models.** [Print newspapers aren’t going away all that rapidly, but seven-day-a-week home delivery does seem likely to be cut in various places, as it already has.]
- **“A strong year for ad spending.”** [I guess that’s the seventh, although it’s not numbered.]

I find *media life* useful; I find the standing assumption that *media equals advertising* annoying. But, of course, I’m not the target audience. Oh, the writer claimed these were all *bold* predictions. Really? They sure don’t look bold to me!

Ten Bold Predictions for Ebooks and Digital Publishing in 2014

Speaking of *bold* predictions, here’s Jeremy Greenfield’s [December 20, 2013](#) list at *digitalbookworld*. He starts by linking back to [a set of 2012 predictions](#), also that magic number 10 and key “bold.”

How bold and successful? For 2013, they predicted more consolidation among big publishers. But the biggie (Penguin and Random House) was already in the works, and I haven’t heard of any others. They said 2013 would be “the year of the enhanced ebook.” Bold, yes. Right, not as far as I

know. “The \$0 Kindle.” Also wrong. More DRM-free ebooks from publishers, sold directly to consumers: Partly right. Ebook marketplace growth will slow: Right, but not bold, since the slowdown began in 2012. Ebook marketing will be completely rethought: Huh? Major privacy breach at a library involving ebooks/reader info: Not that I know of. 65% of U.S. children having access to e-reading devices by year’s end: I don’t believe that happened. There are a couple of others. I see some bold and some correct predictions, but few that are both.

So let’s move on to some of 2013’s calls for this year, with the usual [bracketed notes]:

- **Barnes & Noble will close or sell Nook and go private.** [No idea.]
- **Amazon will go the way of Barnes & Noble...and open its own physical stores in 2014.** [Could happen.]
- **Trade publishers will sell and acquire assets to “verticalize” their businesses.** [Don’tcha love jargon? You’ll have to read this one yourself.]
- **The illustrated book business will become severely challenged.** [The writeup for this seems to assume that ebooks are *the future* even as their market share seems to be settling in at 30% or so; otherwise, it’s an odd one.]
- **Publishers will go after new revenue streams as ebook revenue growth continues to taper.** [Like, for example, print books? Nahh...not in *digitalbookworld*. They mean things like conferences and education and institutional customers.]
- **Paraphrased: Publisher support for subscription ebooks.** [I continue to doubt that subscription ebooks make much sense on a large scale. That may be me.]
- **Paraphrased: More publishers add magazines and websites around ebook specialties.** [What? Dead magazines? Seems likely.]
- **Publishers will move toward data-drive decision making.** [Yes, the typo’s in the boldface numbered highly important presumably-edited heading. I suspect publishers have been *trying* to be data-driven for years—but, as one observer says, the data ain’t all that good.]
- **More price experimentation.** [Not a bold projection, but a near-certainty.]
- **Paraphrased: The big five make all their ebooks available to libraries for purchase.** [With “purchase” in scare quotes; seems at least plausible.]

Clearly, “bold” in the predictions business has taken on a different meaning than I would have expected, based on this and the previous item.

2014 Top Tech Trends

This one is a slideshow appearing on January 13, 2014 on John R. Lang’s *The Proverbial Lone Wolf Librarian’s Weblog*—but it seems to come from Experts Exchange, and, well, They’re Experts, so they must be Right. (Read the Talk page for the Experts Exchange Wikipedia article for more about this; I wouldn’t bother with the advertorial that appears as an Experts Exchange Wikipedia page, although its long list of footnotes, almost none of which meet Wikipedia’s supposed criteria for trustworthy sources and almost all of which are the operation’s own website, certainly gives one pause.)

Anyway...here’s what I can glean as the ten Top Tech Trends (yes, *of course* it’s ten) from this group of anonymous Experts, paraphrased and with my own [snark] as appropriate:

- **Windows 8 will continue to decline...MS will release “next” codebase in late 2014 or 2015.** [Windows 8.1 is up to 200 million licenses, not including bulk purchases. But, y’know, that doesn’t compare to the overwhelming marketplace dominance of OS X 10.9 “Maverick”...oh, wait...]
- **Fewer companies will manufacture tablets as profit margins plunge...they will not replace computers.** [Well, for starters, tablets *are* computers, oh ye Experts—but no, tablets won’t entirely replace desktops and notebooks. Why would they? As for fewer companies...not that I can see.]
- **TV + Internet = one in the same.** [The expansion talks about “demise of cable and satellite subscriptions, similar to what happened to newspapers,” demonstrating ignorance of media in general. Talk to Comcast about the death of cable some time...]
- **Smartphones and other mobile devices will become more attached to other hardware...** [Examples? Those smart refrigerators and wifi-connected toys you always wanted. In 2014 or shortly thereafter, you’ll be able to “make dinner” from your smartphone and use it to “drive the car.” OK.]
- **HTML 5 will continue to grow in popularity, and more functionality will be added.** [Even a stopped clock is right twice a day.]
- **Flash will DIE.** [Because Apple, apparently.]

➤ **Social mining**... [Says more of it, right, but also that the sites “will need to take more responsibility” for protecting users. Nice dream.] Overall? Not impressed. I’d prefer Pew’s big survey-based pontifications, and I’m no great friend of Pew.

The Fortune Crystal Ball

I read this piece in print, as part of *Fortune*’s January 13, 2014 “Future Issue,” but the same piece [appears to be available online](#). I say “appears” because it’s one of those 33-page ad-laden listicles and I wasn’t willing to plow through it all after reading the friendly, easy-to-navigate, read-anywhere print version. (The same issue has wowie-zowie “future” essays on Qualcomm, Google Ventures, Robert Downey Jr. as futurist (!), and Snapchat as a revolutionary new model.)

Fortune hasn’t done this sort of thing very often, and they have fun with it—but also offer a percentage probability of the prediction coming true by December 31, 2014. The last two sentences of the introduction are key: “The only thing we’re quite sure of? It’s more fun than predicting the weather.” A few of the many items, paraphrased:

- The Fed will screw up tapering and trigger a financial crisis. (They say 19%, basically saying “highly unlikely.”)
- Democrats will hold a Senate majority. (71%)
- Bravo will develop a reality show about people at a conference about conferences (yes, there are such things—e.g., the American Planning Association). (97%)
- Fuel-cell cars will hit showrooms (97%)
- Oregon and New Mexico will legalize marriage equality; Oregon will legalize marijuana.
- Google will release a “quantified self” Glass app to determine your emotional well-being and let your friends know when you’re having a bad day. (76%)
- The smart money will bail out of tech. (56%)
- Apple “will shoot another blank”—that is, won’t have an OMG product in 2014 (60%).

Lots more, some of it at least fun.

World-Changing Ideas of 2014

How better to end a silly section like this than with cultist predictions—that is, this article from the February 2014 *Fast Company*. (Again: I read it in print, but [this online version](#)—if you’re willing to figure out how to navigate it—may be the same thing.)

As I was reading these, I began to realize that they have to be taken within a specific context: *FastCo*’s target readership, the affluent young folk

who actually buy into the whole *FastCo* mythos. I treat it as a *National Lampoon* variant or a badly done print version of *The Onion*, albeit with less separation between ads and editorial than either of those. Oh, by the way, these are **12 BOLD PREDICTIONS** (in bold-face and all caps in the magazine) and very specifically claim to be world-changing in 2014.

I’ll summarize a few. Your phone will listen to you—not like Siri, but serving up “information before you even ask for it.” “You will make 4 billion new friends” because some new satellites will deliver 3G to isolated areas in developing countries. “Your eye will unlock everything”—in 2014, because, I guess, you’re going to replace *all your devices* with new iris-reading replacements. In 2014. “You will actually use a 3-D printer.” Not *more people will*, but *you will*. If you’re a proper *FastCo* reader, that is. They may be right on that one.

Oh, and *you will* swallow a sensor (because sensor-equipped smart pills will be *ubiquitous* in 2014!) and Google will “perfect the data pipeline,” which seems to imply that Google Fiber will move from Kansas City and a handful of other cities to *everywhere*. This year. Whatever.

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Masthead

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