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Intersections

One More Chunk of DOAJ

The best way to introduce this article is to quote a few paragraphs from INTERSECTIONS: THE THIRD HALF in the [January 2015 Cites & Insights](#):

The section “Maybe It’s Four, Not Three?” is a small portion of what I’d do if I did a paperback (print-on-demand) version of *Journals and “Journals”: A Look at Gold OA*. Such a book would use a very large subset of DOAJ as it existed in May 2014 as the basis for examining gold OA—with sidebars for the rest of Beall (most of which is “journals” rather than journals) and the rest of OASPA (which doesn’t amount to much). It would assume a four-part model for some of the discussion (megajournals, bio/med, STEM other than biology, and HSS).

But it would also add some additional DOAJ journals, drawn from around 2,000 that have English as one language but not the first one (and a few hundred that were somehow missed in the latest pass). Based on a sampling of 30 or so, I’d guess that this would yield 500 to 1,000 more journals (that are reachable, actually OA, and have enough English for me to verify the APC, if any, and cope with the archives), possibly fewer, possibly more.

The paperback might also include the three existing pieces of JOURNALS AND “JOURNALS,” depending on the length and final nature of the new portion. If so, the old material would follow the new. The paperback would cost \$45 (I think), and a PDF ebook would be the same price.

Since curiosity hasn’t quite killed me off yet, I may do this in any case, but it would be a lot more likely if I thought that a few people (or libraries or institutions or groups involved with OA) would actually buy it. If you’re interested—without making a commitment—drop me a line at waltcrawford@gmail.com saying so (or leave a comment on the *Walt at Random* post I’ll do in December 2014).

On one hand, absolutely no responses were received to the request in that final paragraph or the *Walt at Random* post.

On the other, an inquiry panned out, such that there *will* be a crisp, coherent, professionally published overview of (almost all of) the open access journal landscape as of mid-2014: “Idealism and Opportunism: The State of Open Access Journals,” an issue of ALA’s *Library Technology Reports* appearing this summer. It will be brief (around 18,000 words, or the equivalent of a 24-page *Cites & Insights*) and include advice for librarians on getting involved in gold OA and helping authors and readers avoid scammy OA. If your library doesn’t subscribe to *LTR* (or you’re not at a library), the issue should be separately available for around \$45, less if you’re an ALA member; I believe standard practice is for the first chapter to be free online.

In order to prepare that publication, I have done what was suggested in the second paragraph. I’ve gone through the DOAJ listings that have English as one of the listed languages (around 2,200), yielding 1,507 additional entries for my master DOAJ spreadsheet, which now includes 6,490 journals that qualify for full analysis and 811 more that either can’t be reached, don’t match my definition of OA article journals, or are too opaque to measure. The other 700 or so did not have enough English in any version of the interface for me to be able to analyze them.

Inside This Issue

Words: Books, E and P, 2014 10

There are still some 2,408 journals in DOAJ that I couldn’t analyze, mostly because they’re entirely non-English. That would add more than 30% to the 7,301 journals I *have* looked at—but some searching at DOAJ suggests that these are mostly smaller journals, probably adding no more than 18% to 20% to the article counts. It appears that 70% to 80% of these 2,408 journals don’t charge author-side fees. (If I’m right about the 18%-20%, it means that DOAJ-listed journals *alone* accounted for at least 400,000 articles in 2013, setting aside the sideshow of “Beall’s list.”)

I also made two other changes in the dataset:

- I revisited “O” journals in the expanded DOAJ spreadsheet, looking up each title directly in *DOAJ*. I was able to determine presumed article counts for 106 of the journals (of 295 original cases, including those encountered in this final subgroup).
- For journals categorized as “D/C” that, in fact, had no articles later than 2010, I recategorized them as “E/C”—empty and explicitly canceled.

I won’t offer a full update of the overall figures in the January essay; you’ll have to wait for the publication this summer. I will add some notes on the oddly miscellaneous 1,507 and some of how they change the overall picture, and some thoughts after completing this analysis.

Notes on DOAJ3

Nothing ties this group together. Most of them are journals that don’t have English as the primary language but do offer some English in the interface—but it appears that a few just got missed along the way.

Of the 1,507 journals, 104 were unreachable or unworkable (X), 101 were opaque or obscure (not including those that yielded article counts through a DOAJ search) (O), 133 were not actually OA journals of scholarly articles (N), and 22 were empty (E). That leaves 1,147 journals that published (countable) articles between January 1, 2011 and June 30, 2014. Those 1,147 journals published roughly 47,600 articles in 2013.

By specific grade, 867 were A (apparently good), 83 were B (usually because of high fees), 21 were C (in two-thirds of the cases because they probably had APCs but didn’t disclose them), and 167 were D (diminished, dead, etc.)

Looking more closely at some of the grades:

- X: 45 journals yielded 404 errors (and two more consistently yielded 404s for issues or archives); more than a dozen are now parking pages or otherwise replaced with something other than a journal; some two dozen were unreachable but not 404 (tested at least twice on different days); seven either attempted to download malware or were otherwise flagged as malicious. The rest were a mix of other problems, including one that opened eight ad windows before I was able to shut it down (I have Firefox set *not* to open popup windows).

The most curious may be one journal that now appears to be a Smithsonian *shopping* page.

- O: More than 40 of these had no apparent dates in the archive; another 40+ offered only whole-issue PDFs; the rest were opaque for various reasons, including one in which archives were split across nine subsections of the journal.
- N: More than 50 consisting of conference or workshop proceedings; more than 30 that require registration to read articles; several that are magazines rather than journals (without enough refereed articles to count); a few that are monographic series; at least ten that do *not* mention pre-publication or post-publication peer review; a few with embargoes; and at least one that’s now “hybrid.”
- D: 46 that have explicitly shut down or have not had any articles since 2012; seven that appear to be dying based on publication patterns; 40 with erratic publication patterns (and fewer than five articles in at least one year); 23 that may be on hiatus; one that appears to be new; and 50 small journals.

Additional notes on Grades A-D

Three of these journals published more than 1,000 articles in the peak year between 2011 and 2014; 41 published 200 to 999 articles; 61 published 100 to 199 articles; 113 published 60 to 99 articles; 201 published 35 to 59 articles; 315 published 20 to 34 articles; and 413 published fewer than 20.

Of journals with APCs, three charged \$2,000 and up; 32 charged \$1,000 to \$1,999; 33 charged \$300 to \$999; 50 charged \$100 to \$299; and 28 charged \$9 to \$99.

Table 1 shows the number of journals, number of articles in 2013, and the percentage of free journals (FJ%) and articles in those journals (FA%) by subject, in order by number of articles in 2013. The medical journals within this group are not typical of medical journals in *DOAJ* in general (with a *much* higher percentage of free journals and articles), as are some other cases—including Law, where the only *DOAJ* journals charging fees are in this group.

In terms of age, 39 of the journals started before 2000 (82% free); 158 started in 2000-2004 (91% free); 272 started in 2005-2009 (90% free); 420 started in 2005-2009 (86% free); and 257 started in 2010-2013 (77% free). One free journal started in 2014. (Others may have but did not show any articles as of June 30, 2014). While the percentage of

free startups did go down a little in 2010-2013, the decline is much smaller than in *DOAJ* as a whole.

Subject	Jour.	Art.	FJ%	FA%
Medicine	184	9,341	84%	80%
Computer Science	42	4,175	83%	32%
Agriculture	83	4,019	66%	67%
Economics	85	3,243	82%	54%
Language & Literature	94	2,710	99%	99%
Earth Sciences	52	2,574	75%	37%
Miscellany	38	2,382	89%	95%
Ecology	29	2,237	69%	34%
Education	63	1,847	94%	91%
Sociology	29	1,826	90%	82%
Science	10	1,664	60%	11%
Biology	32	1,585	63%	57%
Arts & Architecture	68	1,408	94%	82%
History	44	1,311	100%	100%
Zoology	30	1,298	73%	58%
Anthropology	43	865	91%	91%
Psychology	22	848	77%	75%
Law	43	752	95%	95%
Engineering	19	723	79%	84%
Political Science	39	644	92%	96%
Religion	15	607	87%	36%
Media & Communications	19	428	95%	90%
Philosophy	23	420	96%	95%
Library Science	23	343	91%	96%
Physics	6	221	67%	47%
Chemistry	5	89	80%	89%
Mathematics	5	86	100%	100%
Technology	2	29	100%	100%

Table 1. Journals (A-D) and articles by subject, DOAJ3

A Few Overall Notes

For 2013, gold OA journals in *DOAJ* published more than 366,000 articles—plus at least another 37,000 in *DOAJ* journals not analyzed here. Thus, there were more than 400,000 gold OA articles even omitting all journals that are *not* in *DOAJ* (which probably account for another 73,000).

If all fee-charging journals received full APCs (for full reviewed articles, 10 pages each), with no waivers, for all articles published in 2013, the revenue would add up to a little less than \$231 million. (non-*DOAJ* journals might account for another

\$21.7 million). The average cost per article is \$630, misleading as that average is.

Table 2 shows subject breakdowns for 2013 journals and articles for *all* of *DOAJ* (that I was able to analyze). It's the equivalent of Table 1 but for *all* analyzed journals in *DOAJ*, showing journals and 2013 articles for each subject and the percentage of free journals (%FJ) and free articles (%FA).

You'll find two related tables at the end of this article—Tables 4 and 5, which replace (both correcting and expanding) Tables 2.66a, 2.67a, 3.33 and 3.34 in earlier issues.

Subject	Jour	%FJ	Art	%FA
Agriculture	309	58%	16,880	44%
Anthropology	132	86%	2,663	77%
Arts & Architecture	150	95%	2,647	84%
Biology	336	38%	24,127	24%
Chemistry	136	59%	12,258	30%
Computer science	338	53%	23,281	24%
Earth Sciences	189	73%	7,109	46%
Ecology	153	53%	8,295	27%
Economics	345	69%	10,663	50%
Education	319	88%	7,332	80%
Engineering	245	57%	19,336	26%
History	136	98%	2,739	98%
Language & Literature	262	95%	6,243	73%
Law	106	95%	2,019	93%
Library Science	77	94%	1,363	92%
Mathematics	228	79%	13,190	40%
Media & Communications	79	91%	1,667	73%
Medicine	1,702	49%	103,908	36%
Miscellany	87	69%	7,375	38%
Philosophy	96	95%	1,409	90%
Physics	125	53%	10,509	31%
Political Science	129	91%	2,402	84%
Psychology	74	76%	2,926	52%
Religion	65	88%	1,603	47%
Science	118	51%	11,097	21%
Sociology	234	83%	7,227	63%
Technology	138	59%	9,688	49%
Zoology	178	57%	9,581	47%
Total	6,490	65%	366,210	36%

Table 2. Journal and article count by subject

Finally, I thought it might be interesting to look at journals that I believe authors would be likely to publish in, if they took the time to find out a bit

about journals: that is, grades A and B and some portions of D (erratic, new and small). Table 3 shows key figures for the large *DOAJ* set and for Beall journals that aren't in *DOAJ*.

Group	Journals	Free%	Articles	Free%
DOAJ	5,695	68%	334,025	37%
Beall	1,960	6%	41,403	2%
Ratio	2.9		8.1	

Table 3. Journals and articles in grades A-B (and D)

Note that, once dubious and dying journals are omitted, there are almost three times as many workable journals in *DOAJ* as in the remainder of the Beall lists—and those journals published more than eight times as many articles in 2013.

Want More?

The complete overview will appear this summer, without the extensive detail (and possibly consequent errors) in the previous articles.

If you wish to do different or more detailed tabulations, or look at correlations, anonymized versions of two of the spreadsheets used for this article are now available on figshare. The [DOAJ spreadsheet](http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1299451) is at <http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1299451>; the [Beall spreadsheet](http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1299452) (Beall-set journals *not* in *DOAJ*) is at <http://dx.doi.org/10.6084/m9.figshare.1299452>. There were too few OASPA journals not in *DOAJ* to make an anonymized spreadsheet useful.

Clarified Tables

When I was preparing these and related figures for the study that will appear this summer, I found that some of the tables in the December 2014 and January 2015 issues were either wrong or misleading.

Tables 2.66a, 2.67a, 3.33 and 3.34 are *wrong*: article counts are too high (apparently reflecting 2011-2014) while revenue is for 2013, yielding cost per article figures that are too low.

Tables 2.66b-c and 2.67b-c (Beall and OASPA journals) may or may not be correct, but in either case aren't directly comparable to *DOAJ* figures. Therefore, I'm including six additional tables. Tables 4 and 5 show 2013 article counts and cost per article for the nearly-complete subset of *DOAJ* to be used in this summer's overview, and replace Tables 3.33 and 3.34 (which in turn replaced and expanded Tables 2.66a and 2.67a). The new tables are interleaved with new Tables 2.66b-c and 2.67b-c, which provide comparable figures, noting that there's a *lot* of overlap between the OASPA set and

the *DOAJ* set and a little overlap between the Beall set and the *DOAJ* set.

Overall cost per article sorted by cost

Subject	\$/article	Articles
Mega	\$1,353.52	36,673
Biology	\$1,227.94	24,127
Physics	\$869.79	10,509
Medicine	\$816.25	103,908
Psychology	\$811.77	2,926
Chemistry	\$713.13	12,258
Total	\$630.05	366,210
Science	\$585.92	11,097
Mathematics	\$508.05	13,190
Ecology	\$420.43	8,295
Earth Sciences	\$406.95	7,109
Technology	\$352.59	9,688
Agriculture	\$336.41	16,880
Zoology	\$269.20	9,581
Engineering	\$252.39	19,336
Computer science	\$240.76	23,281
Religion	\$183.95	1,603
Economics	\$121.84	10,663
Sociology	\$121.73	7,227
Anthropology	\$109.62	2,663
Media & Communications	\$105.40	1,667
Miscellany	\$82.17	7,375
Philosophy	\$65.24	1,409
Language & Literature	\$61.80	6,243
Education	\$58.09	7,332
Political Science	\$32.68	2,402
Arts & Architecture	\$17.33	2,647
Law	\$16.63	2,019
Library Science	\$10.29	1,363
History	\$10.09	2,739

Table 4. *DOAJ*, \$/article, 2013

Subject	\$/article	Articles
Psychology	\$2,120.81	1,102
Biology	\$1,856.91	12,156
Technology	\$1,814.92	1,103
Medicine	\$1,557.74	70,352
Total	\$1,482.63	110,175
Agriculture	\$1,433.18	2,263
Chemistry	\$1,422.23	4,722
Physics	\$1,157.21	2,343
Philosophy	\$1,133.33	24
Zoology	\$1,107.72	1,426
Science	\$1,072.27	2,215
Computer science	\$1,068.28	1,386
Anthropology	\$1,042.23	139
Mathematics	\$1,035.36	4,430
Engineering	\$867.37	2,733
Ecology	\$847.93	726
Earth Sciences	\$702.65	615
Sociology	\$484.25	778
Political Science	\$240.78	116
Education	\$223.79	227
Religion	\$177.91	93
Miscellany	\$113.50	457
Arts & Architecture	\$111.28	116
Economics	\$110.79	211
Media & Communications	\$69.58	48
History	\$5.57	150
Language & Literature	\$0.00	67
Law	\$0.00	147
Library Science	\$0.00	30

Table 2.66b (revised) OASPA, \$/article, 2013.

Subject	\$/article	Articles
Earth Sciences	\$520.75	1,423
Philosophy	\$517.91	115
Medicine	\$501.39	25,503
Anthropology	\$491.25	64
Law	\$465.08	248
Physics	\$417.46	2,986
Ecology	\$402.91	3,243
Agriculture	\$396.88	6,555
Psychology	\$395.61	546
Biology	\$378.06	7,722
Mathematics	\$343.26	3,879
History	\$324.34	149
Total	\$297.88	115,698
Education	\$293.09	3,012
Chemistry	\$275.22	1,881
Media & Communications	\$258.14	253
Economics	\$257.88	7,353
Arts & Architecture	\$255.65	248
Political Science	\$252.02	649
Zoology	\$243.75	1,312
Technology	\$225.24	4,552
Language & Literature	\$222.70	1,325
Sociology	\$198.96	2,449
Computer Science	\$178.41	9,650
Engineering	\$161.15	14,620
Religion	\$150.00	2
Library Science	\$141.85	313
Science	\$92.20	11,141
Miscellany	\$43.01	4,505

Table 2.66c (revised). Beall, \$/article, 2013

Overall cost per article sorted by articles

Subject	\$/article	Articles
Total	\$630.05	366,210
Medicine	\$816.25	103,908
Mega	\$1,353.52	36,673
Biology	\$1,227.94	24,127
Computer science	\$240.76	23,281
Engineering	\$252.39	19,336
Agriculture	\$336.41	16,880
Mathematics	\$508.05	13,190
Chemistry	\$713.13	12,258
Science	\$585.92	11,097
Economics	\$121.84	10,663
Physics	\$869.79	10,509
Technology	\$352.59	9,688
Zoology	\$269.20	9,581
Ecology	\$420.43	8,295
Miscellany	\$82.17	7,375
Education	\$58.09	7,332
Sociology	\$121.73	7,227
Earth Sciences	\$406.95	7,109
Language & Literature	\$61.80	6,243
Psychology	\$811.77	2,926
History	\$10.09	2,739
Anthropology	\$109.62	2,663
Arts & Architecture	\$17.33	2,647
Political Science	\$32.68	2,402
Law	\$16.63	2,019
Media & Communications	\$105.40	1,667
Religion	\$183.95	1,603
Philosophy	\$65.24	1,409
Library Science	\$10.29	1,363

Table 5. DOAJ \$/article 2013, sorted by articles

Subject	\$/article	Articles
Total	\$1,482.63	110,175
Medicine	\$1,557.74	70,352
Biology	\$1,856.91	12,156
Chemistry	\$1,422.23	4,722
Mathematics	\$1,035.36	4,430
Engineering	\$867.37	2,733
Physics	\$1,157.21	2,343
Agriculture	\$1,433.18	2,263
Science	\$1,072.27	2,215
Zoology	\$1,107.72	1,426
Computer science	\$1,068.28	1,386
Technology	\$1,814.92	1,103
Psychology	\$2,120.81	1,102
Sociology	\$484.25	778
Ecology	\$847.93	726
Earth Sciences	\$702.65	615
Miscellany	\$113.50	457
Education	\$223.79	227
Economics	\$110.79	211
History	\$5.57	150
Law	\$0.00	147
Anthropology	\$1,042.23	139
Arts & Architecture	\$111.28	116
Political Science	\$240.78	116
Religion	\$177.91	93
Language & Literature	\$0.00	67
Media & Communications	\$69.58	48
Library Science	\$0.00	30
Philosophy	\$1,133.33	24

Table 2.67b. OASPA \$/article 2013, sorted by articles

Subject	\$/article	Articles
Total	\$297.88	115,698
Medicine	\$501.39	25,503
Engineering	\$161.15	14,620
Science	\$92.20	11,141
Computer Science	\$178.41	9,650
Biology	\$378.06	7,722
Economics	\$257.88	7,353
Agriculture	\$396.88	6,555
Technology	\$225.24	4,552
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Political Science	\$252.02	649
Psychology	\$395.61	546
Library Science	\$141.85	313
Media & Communications	\$258.14	253
Arts & Architecture	\$255.65	248
Law	\$465.08	248
History	\$324.34	149
Philosophy	\$517.91	115
Anthropology	\$491.25	64
Religion	\$150.00	2

Table 2.67c. Beall \$/article 2013, sorted by articles

Poking at the Ns

I categorized a total of 165 DOAJ listings as N, not meeting the definition of open access I'm using for this overview. While the LTR issue will include a very quick one-paragraph summary of how that breaks down, I go into a little more detail here—including some thoughts as to *why* some journals are the way they are.

- **Can't get full text:** Two of these, which could go in grade O (opaque) rather than N. No further comments.
- **Conference, workshop or seminar proceedings:** 53 in all. I excluded these because the peer-review requirement for conference pa-

pers appear to be significantly different than for journal articles, especially when the conferences are directly linked to the journals (and aren't from existing societies). Some of these may contain valuable material; at least a few look a little sketchy.

- **Dissertations and theses:** Two of these, and maybe I'm wrong to exclude them.
- **Embargoes:** Four journals, which aren't gold OA by any reasonable definition (and could be lumped with "Not OA" later).
- **Encyclopedia:** The *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* is a great project—but it's not an OA journal.
- **Hybrid:** One journal became hybrid after being admitted to DOAJ, and should no longer qualify as OA.
- **Invited:** Seven journals consist entirely of invited and commissioned articles; it's hard to square that with proper peer review.
- **Magazines:** 15 of these, some of which might have the occasional peer-reviewed article but none with a significant number of such articles. (I think the idea of journals that include magazine-like features, and maybe charges for them, is fine. In none of these cases could I find enough clearly identified peer-reviewed articles to constitute even a very small journal.)
- **Membership required:** One journal that requires society membership not just to submit articles (where that's another version of a fee) but even to read them, which makes it flat-out not OA.
- **Monographs:** Five "journals" that are actually monographic series, where the nature of peer review is unclear.
- **No final papers:** Two journals consisting entirely of working papers.
- **Not OA:** Eleven journals simply weren't OA—they required subscriptions or imposed other blocks to reading. (See also "Registration required.")
- **Not peer-reviewed:** Thirteen journals clearly didn't require either pre-publication or post-publication peer review.
- **Not research/not papers:** Eight journals consisting of reports, not scholarly articles.
- **Only special issues:** One journal that seems to consist entirely of special issues, which raises questions about peer review.
- **Registration required:** 38 journals that won't let you read articles until you register. Here's the

one that I just don't get (38 may be low: I did not open an article from each and every journal, although I did whenever there was any indication that something might be amiss). Why would an OA journal require registration? If it's to get demographic data, an optional questionnaire would be better. If it's to get email addresses so that readers can be ~~spammed~~ invited to submit articles, well, either a reader can submit a phony email address or there's a verification step, which is a *real* barrier to actual access. (Since I never filled in a registration form, I have no idea how that breaks down.) In any case, once readers are required to identify themselves in order to read articles, true open access is shot: If anonymity is not possible, access is compromised. For some of these other subcategories, I think there's a sound argument for including them in the mainstream, although I didn't do so. For this one, I don't believe that's the case: These journals undermine OA.

- **Screeds:** One journal appears to consist entirely of quasipolitical screeds (in the medical field but advocacy rather than research, as far as I could tell).

It's an odd mix. If I wanted to maximize the number of true OA journals, I'd include the conference proceedings, dissertations and theses, invited journals and monographs, adding 67 (right around 1%) to the total. I would not *ever* add journals that require registration.

Just as an oddity, a very small number of journal sites—somewhere between three and six, I think—had a sign-in screen pop up on the way into the journal sites themselves. In each case, however, clicking on Cancel rather than filling in an ID yielded the journal sites and I was able to read articles, so I just counted these as sloppy site design.

Very Small Journals?

The subgrade D/S includes journals that rarely have more than ten articles per year, sometimes have fewer than five articles per year, but don't necessarily show a "dying journal" curve. There are 375 such journals in the DOAJ subset studied. I thought it might be interesting to take a stab at classifying those journals: how many appear to be in niches so narrow that a very small journal makes sense—and how many appear to be failing (that is, they're in subjects where it's not plausible that a worthwhile journal would have so few papers)?

"Take a stab" is the right term: I really can't say for quite a few of these whether they're plausible very small journals. But I can provide some quick numbers.

No guess

For 55 journals, most of them non-English, I couldn't begin to guess (from the title and subject) whether they're very small or simply not succeeding. That includes 50 journals without APCs, six with APCs (three in excess of \$1,000) and one unknown.

Those 57 journals published a total of 221 articles in 2011, 228 in 2012, 209 in 2013 and 109 in the first half of 2014—about as close to steady-state as you can get.

Failing

I believe that 117 journals are in subjects where you'd expect that any well-run journal would have at least five articles per year and probably several times that many. Let's break that down by broad subject area:

- **Biomed:** 52 journals, of which seven do *not* have APCs, 44 do have APCs—and one is unknown. Fees are fairly typical for biomed journals, which is to say high—one over \$2,000, 26 between \$1,000 and \$1,999, 13 (all from the same publisher) at \$800, and four between \$150 and \$600. The 52 journals published a total of 226 articles in 2011, 237 in 2012, 204 in 2013, and 98 in the first half of 2014.
- **Humanities and Social Sciences:** 33 journals, of which 26 are free (do not have APCs), six have APCs (mostly \$519 to \$800, with one at \$150), and one is unknown. The 33 journals published a total of 170 articles in 2011, 160 in 2012, 150 in 2013—and 54 in the first half of 2014.
- **Science, technology, engineering and math:** 32 journals, of which 14 do not have APCs and 18 do have APCs, two of them over \$1,000, a dozen at \$800 (the same publisher as the 13 in biomed) and four at other levels. These journals published a total of 193 articles in 2011, 153 in 2012, 135 in 2013 and only 52 in the first half of 2014.

Niche

The remaining 201 journals—more than half of the group—may be in sufficiently narrow niches that only a few articles each year are likely. Once again, I'll break them down by broad subject area.

- **Biomed:** 23 journals, of which eight do not charge APCs and 15 do charge APCs—

including two at \$2,600, ten more at \$1,695 and higher, two more above \$1,000 and only one at less than \$1,000. The 23 journals published a total of 99 articles in 2011, 98 in 2012, 106 in 2013 and 48 in the first half of 2014.

- **Humanities and social sciences:** More than half of this group—133 in all, of which 128 do not charge APCs, three do charge APCs (ranging from \$167 to \$1,450) and two are unknown. The 133 journals published a total of 509 articles in 2011, 513 in 2012, 491 in 2013 and 258 in the first half of 2014: very close to steady-state publishing.
- **Science, technology, engineering and math:** 45 journals, of which a surprising 39 do not charge APCs and six do have APCs. Of those six, two exceed \$1,000. The 45 journals published a total of 188 articles in 2011, 173 in 2012, 154 in 2013—and only 60 in the first half of 2014.

Overall, my best guess is that perhaps 220-230 of these journals could be legitimate niche journals. They don't have much impact on overall article patterns, but they may be important in their niches.

Opportunism, Idealism and Initiative

The current working title of my *Library Technology Reports* issue is “Idealism and Opportunism: The State of Open Access Journals.” That's because, as I was working on it, I began to see gold OA as an interesting mix of opportunism and idealism. I devote about 600 words in Chapter 1 of that report to a discussion of that concept, but I thought a few more comments might be in order, although they may seem a bit incomplete at this point. I also find myself adding a third term: *initiative*—which could be thought of as a neutral synonym for opportunism (which carries a somewhat negative connotation).

Growing up, I remember seeing lots of cement trucks from Kaiser Cement (or Permanente Cement or both) with “Find a need and fill it” on the side. Henry J. Kaiser probably didn't originate that quote, but he used it a lot. It's relevant here. If a new journal doesn't fill an existing need, it's purely opportunistic—but most new journals involve at least some level of initiative. Actually, for a purely opportunistic journal, the need is the on the part of the would-be publisher, to acquire more mindspace, subscription revenue or author-side fees. But most new journals involve something a little less cynical. (Even “journals” require a trivial amount of work, namely plugging a new name into a webpage template and

creating a new webpage. My guess is that, for a “publisher” with 400 “journals,” that effort could amount to as much as two minutes per journal.)

What needs require new OA journals? Setting aside the wholly opportunistic “We want to publish lots of new journals because Profit,” examples include:

- Emerging fields that aren't covered well by existing journals.
- The needs of scholars in less-developed nations to publish locally relevant articles that won't make it into Big International Journals.
- The desire of a group to provide access to scholarship not burdened by high subscription costs.
- The desire of a publisher or agency to provide competition for overpriced journals.

The mix of motives

In my opinion, the most opportunistic players in open access are big toll publishers charging very high APCs for new journals or, perhaps worse, very high APCs to make articles in “hybrid” journals available, especially when such publishers are, shall we say, slow to make those articles *legitimately* fully OA and show little or no indication of offsetting publication charges with those APCs.

As for pure idealism, it's pretty hard to fault any of the publishers of no-fee OA journals, especially the academics and others who maintain such journals with no explicit funding sources.

If a publisher actually manages to acquire large sums of money through APCs while failing to offer serious peer review or maintain legitimate journals, the publisher's an opportunist. Most such opportunists don't seem to do very well: most so-called “predatory publishers” haven't published anything and presumably haven't profited significantly from APCs for nonexistent articles. At least for those of us in the U.S., I'm guessing that greeting people at Home Depot or waiting tables in a state that requires minimum wage even for waiters (I'm a Californian, and California is one such state) is an easier way to make money than is publishing questionable OA journals. Yes, there are publishing companies with millions of dollars in OA revenues—but I don't believe there are many of them (I'd guess 15 at most—and at least ten of those are reputable by all accounts), and some of those are OA arms of toll publishers.

In the middle are lots of journals and publishers displaying a mix of idealism and opportunism, a mix that holds true for a great deal of subscription publishing as well. I don't believe there are clear

benchmarks as to when the balance between idealism and opportunism has tipped over to the “mostly for the money” side. At what point are article processing charges excessive? Can that question even be answered on a general basis? I’ve used \$1,000 as a line—suggesting that any journal charging \$1,000 or more per article deserves special attention as to its costs and services—but that may not be sensible, especially since the equivalent of \$200 for some countries may be a tougher barrier for authors than, say, \$1,350 would be for authors in the first world.

I won’t discuss idealism and opportunism in *OA commentary*; that’s another issue, and maybe this is a good place to end this essay.

Words

Books, E and P, 2014

The January 2014 *Cites & Insights* began with a 24-page WORDS essay BOOKS, E AND P, which covered three or four years’ worth of commentary on ebooks-versus-pbooks (print books) or, increasingly, ebooks *and* print books. Here’s most of the “Finish” section at the end of that roundup:

There will of *course* continue to be “or pundits,” those who insist that ebooks will wipe out print books or turn them into art objects. (I don’t imagine there will be many who argue that ebooks are a fad that will disappear, but who knows?) But most people who think about the situation and are more interested in facts and people than in technology and triumphalism are, I believe, moving toward the “and view”—that print books and ebooks should coexist for decades to come.

I believe that will be true indefinitely. I could make an easy prediction, such as that by the time I die, print books will still be at least a ten-digit and probably an eleven-digit annual business (that is, billions or low tens of billions of dollars: ten-digit is a gimme, frankly). I could posit a percentage, but how could I possibly guess what that percentage will be or whether it will be stable? Thirty percent of trade books? Thirty percent of *all* books? Or, for that matter, print books retaining 30% of the market, yielding 70% to ebooks? All plausible, none of them signaling the death of print books as a large, vibrant field. (Psst: And for public libraries, none of them suggesting that you ought to get rid of print collections—not if you want to stick around long enough to see what the future might hold!)

I also believe that any simplistic formulation of when print or e makes more sense is almost certainly wrong, with one possible exception: For travel-

ing, ebooks (as long as they’re not so DRM-bound that they disappear when your ereader crosses a border!) seem to make more sense for most frequent travelers. But if you say “nonfiction always deserves print, fiction should all migrate to ebooks” I’ll laugh in your general direction on both counts, just as I will if you tell me that *The Digital Generation Doesn’t Read* (or like) *Print Books*.

I could toss out narrower suggestions with a certain amount of snark. For example, I suspect most Big Business Idea books make sense in ebook form because you aren’t wasting recycled plant matter on something of no real import—but actually, most of these books (at least the ones I’ve skimmed) would benefit even more from a Watson-based version of Word’s Autosummarize function. (Unfortunately, Microsoft removed Autosummarize from Word2010; otherwise, I’d offer an example of this quirky but amusing function.) That is: Most of them are really articles padded out to book length—not all, but (I believe) most.

My best guess? Ebooks will claim a substantial portion of the *mass-market* paperback market, probably most (but probably not all) of it. Beyond that, I suspect there’s increasingly good reason to believe that ebooks might increase the size of the pie rather than just grabbing market share from print books.

A year later, how do those short-term predictions or guesses look? The one in parentheses is a little off: 2014 did see a couple of clowns arguing that ebooks were going to disappear, which strikes me as about as likely as print books disappearing.

Otherwise? Thirty percent is starting to look like a plausible level for ebooks as a percentage of the trade-book market (in units, somewhat lower in dollars), and that’s a healthy market. The book publishing industry was healthier in 2014 than in 2013, so my final suspicion might have some truth to it. As to the mass-market paperback market, there’s an October 2014 item about that here. Briefly, after *huge* declines from 2010 to 2013, the mass-market paperback market is stabilizing, even as ebook sales continue to rise (albeit much more slowly than in the past). So “probably not all” is, so far, about right—and I think “substantial portion” isn’t too far off either.

I’ve found it amusing over the past year to see pundits proclaim the Death of Ereaders, and sometimes the Death of Ebooks, because sales of ereaders either aren’t increasing or actually slowed. That’s an all-too-typical example of wild overreaching: turning a lack of growth into death, what I call the “automobiles died years ago” argument.

Long-time readers who don't read very well may think I've reversed my stance—that now I'm arguing for the survival of ebooks where I used to argue entirely for print books. That's nonsense, of course. What I *did* argue for many years was that it was unlikely that print books would disappear soon (or within my lifetime), that there were legitimate reasons for (some) people to prefer print books, and that Digital Inevitability was bullshit. I always thought there was room for both. I still do—which, in some cases, now means that I'm saying claims that ebooks are dying or dead are, well, bullshit.

Meanwhile, let's look at a group of items that seemed to make sense as fitting into the old "eb-vs-pb" tag (which I've kept for convenience, although the "vs" should be "and" in most cases).

The Marketplace

These items look at numbers between late 2013 and early 2015.

Study: E-books Settle In

Jim Milliot's article at *Publishers Weekly* appeared [October 31, 2013](#). (Hat tip: I encountered the article because "Retiring Guy" posted a bar chart based on the story, an excerpt and some excerpts from the comments [on November 1, 2013](#) at *Retiring Guy's Digest*.)

Milliot discusses a Book Industry Study Group study—the final installment of a four-year project—that suggests that the rapid growth of ebooks plateaued in late 2012 and early 2013 at about 30% of trade book sales by number, about 14% of dollar sales. (Trade books are only part of book publishing.) Either Milliot or BISG calls what's emerging a "hybrid print-e-book market" with 30% of respondents reporting that they purchase ebooks and print books interchangeably. At one point, about half of ebook buyers said they were buying mostly ebooks and fewer print books—but that percentage was dropping.

The first comment is from Jack McKeown on surveys being conducted from 2009 through 2012 by Verso Advertising. Excerpts:

The data consistently pointed to the emergence of a hybrid print-ebook market, with ebook penetration hitting a plateau at 25-30% of the trade market in unit terms. The reasons are threefold:

1. A majority of bookbuyers continue to be resistant to screen reading for books. This resistance particularly is pronounced among avid readers (ten or more books purchased per year). In fact, by the time of our last survey, the resistance had actually intensified to over 50% of bookbuyers.

2. Even among bookbuyers who owned ereaders, split-purchasing behavior is the norm, with most ereader-owners planning to buy an equal number of print and ebooks going forward.

3. The accelerating shift to tablets versus ereaders creates additional drag on ebook adoption, given the pull of multifunction tablets to other media (e.g. streamed video, music, games, email, etc.) and away from books.

I am sure that the digerati will continue to assert, despite the data, that ebooks purchasing will accelerate again to exceed 50% of the market, as they often predicated in the past. But a focus on the consumer's own preferences tells us it just ain't so. The book market was never going to follow in the footsteps of the MP3 revolution and down the path of total digital disruption. The structural differences, books vs. music, were too profound for that to happen. As an industry, here's hoping we can take some comfort in managing to the more moderate expectations of our customers.

One media person seconds this and notes that ebooks have helped improve overall book sales—but there's also a retired would-be pundit who assures us that cheap tablets will cause ebook adoption to "accelerate further." (Worth noting: the BISG study says that lots of bookbuyers want print book/ebook bundles...and that lots of them would buy more ebooks if they could legally resell them.)

Ask The Chefs: "When Do We Stop Printing?"

I thought about whether this [July 31, 2014](#) post at *the scholarly kitchen* belongs in this roundup, since "we" in this case is primarily scholarly *journal* publishers, not trade *book* publishers, but it's an interesting group of responses to David Crotty's opening question.

I think I'm mostly saying "you might or might not find this set of responses, primarily concerned with journal publishing, interesting." You might also find the comments interesting.

I assumed most scholarly journals had already gone e-only, but maybe that's because the only scholarly journals I have access to are OA journals, and most of those don't have print subscriptions (although a few offer print-on-demand). I also assumed publishers would have learned enough to avoid generational responses such as this:

Print use is based on age: As the current senior members of our markets "age out" there will be a diminishing and ultimately no need for printed all. Time Horizon for it to stop completely? 10 to 15 years at least (people are working a lot longer than they used to – and unfortunately change is not their forte)

Really? “Print use is based on age”? Even though pretty much every study shows that younger folks are reading lots of print books and, if anything, have stronger print-book preferences than older folks? Maybe this is something peculiar to journals, or maybe it’s just odd.

A couple of people make an interesting point about “e-only” journals that consist of PDF articles: they’re printed like crazy, but locally rather than centrally. (There’s some discussion in the comments on whether PDF is a good thing or a bad one, and people who hate PDF should read that discussion carefully.) Here’s one example of an editor (David Crotty) who never reads print journals:

Speaking as a reader though, I can’t remember the last time I read an article in the print version of a journal itself. At the same time, I almost exclusively read articles as printed versions of pdf files. I find my concentration is more intense than on a screen, and I find great associative value in visual and positional memory. I can often recall specific figures in a paper from their shape and location—it’s a small figure at the top of the left-hand column in the middle of the article. This is impossible in a scrolling, responsive-design html webpage.

This is a key difference between journal articles and books. I suspect relatively few people print out ebooks (at least I hope that’s the case): it’s expensive, slow and, if the print book is available at a library, sort of a bad idea. But if somebody’s really only reading, say, 5% of the articles in a journal, “I’ll print out what I actually want to read” makes sense.

A heart-warming twist in the tale of the books industry

This Peter Preston article, [on December 28, 2014](#) at *The Guardian*, offers good news for “and people”: “New research shows that the book-buying universe—both digital and printed—is expanding, not contracting.”

The most fascinating and, in many ways, cheering story of 2014 is almost wholly counterintuitive: the survival of the printed book. Turning pages back from digital grave shock! Legacy longform wins fight for life! Robert McCrum told part of the tale a couple of weeks back as he chronicled [Waterstones’ battle into renewed profit](#). But you—the reader—seem to be writing new chapters month by month and Christmas by Christmas.

Preston notes that ebooks seem to have stopped at about 30% of trade book sales and that, if you factor out one particular soft-porn trilogy, the book-buying

universe expanded from 2012 to 2013. “It isn’t a question of either/or. It is a question of both.”

He offers use cases for ebooks on ereaders and that these cases add up to a big business. “But it is not, by any means, the whole of the publishing and bookselling business.” And, as he cites research for, it’s probably getting saturated.

Looking at other print, he notes drooping sales of magazines—but that’s primarily single-copy newsstand sales, not subscriptions. Newspapers are problematic (but, you know, at least in the U.S. daily papers are dying at a remarkably slow rate). There’s more, much of it UK-centric.

Mass Market Paperback: Not Dead Yet

If there’s a single article that makes the case for an “and future” for book publishing, it may be [this October 31, 2014](#) piece by Jim Milliott at *Publishers Weekly*.

Why this piece? Because if there’s part of trade publishing that seems ripe for wholesale displacement by ebooks, it’s the part where print works badly: mass-market paperbacks, with those ultra-tight margins and low-quality paper and print. I doubt that too many people buy mass-market paperbacks as Treasured Possessions, and they aren’t likely to survive many decades on the bookshelf.

When sales of e-books doubled in 2011 over 2010, it seemed as if the mass market paperback format might quickly sink into oblivion. Mass market sales in 2013 were down 52% from 2010 levels, according to BookStats. While sales are down again in 2014, the decline has slowed and there are signs that sales of the format are stabilizing. In the last few weeks alone, for example, unit sales of mass market have been flat compared to the same period last year, according to Nielsen BookScan—even as e-books continue to gain ground in such mass market staples as romance.

That’s the lede, and it’s a reminder of just how fast ebook sales *were* growing in the not-too-distant past, a pace that couldn’t continue for long. Also, for that matter, of just how dramatically mass-market sales did fall (although a 52% drop over four years is a lot different from a 100% increase over *one* year!)

To some extent, as the article notes, the stabilization might be temporary, based on a single book. But there’s more to it. For example, stores that were cutting back the space allotted to mass-market paperbacks have pretty much stopped the cutbacks and publishers are becoming less eager to drop formats that still make money for them.

Oh, and some publishers are using the mass-market format to add print versions of e-only books and self-published books.

The article mentions price, and I must admit I'm astonished by the idea that a publisher could charge more than \$9.99 for a mass-market edition, and apparently most publishers aren't quite so ambitious.

What does seem to be clear: mass-market paperbacks will be around for quite a while—but those paperbacks are a lot less likely to be issued in million-copy editions. That may not be a bad thing.

Book Sales: Print Continues to Hold Its Own

Finally, there's this, which I encountered as [a January 21, 2015 post](#) at *Retiring Guy's Digest* and which links to some other stories. It brings the story forward—not quite a full year, but close.

The bar chart in the article, comparing the first three quarters of 2013 and 2014 for three formats of trade publishing (probably in the U.S.), shows a trivial downturn in hardcover sales (down about 1% and the largest of the three segments), a modest improvement in paperback sales (up about 4%) and a modest increase in ebook sales (up about 6%). That's net revenue for AAP publishers and it's only trade publishing, but each of the three segments is a billion-dollar business, with ebooks the smallest of the three segments. If you're wondering: the ebook segment comes out to a bit less than 24% of the total.

Looking at links in this post, here's some of what I see:

- “Paper is back: Why ‘real’ books are on the rebound” by Frank Catalano [on January 18, 2015](#) at *GeekWire*: After noting that “lowly pressed wood pulp is on the rebound,” Catalano says “The consequence looks more like co-existence than conquest. For now.” He links to [another Publishers Weekly](#) article offering Nielsen BookScan reports on unit sales through those outlets BookScan tracks. That article shows a 2.4% increase in *unit* sales of print books over 2013, which is a bit different than dollar sales. Noting continued strong opposition to e-textbooks, Catalano also notes the plateauing of ebooks (although trying to cast doubt on it) at about 27% of paid U.S. (trade) book sales. He also recounts some other issues—although it strikes me that his admission that the future is and, not or (he qualifies that with “near-term”) is reluctant.
- Other articles note similar trends in the UK and Australia.

Bookstores. Bookstores?

What can I say here—other than, despite the Amazon steamroller, independent bookstores seem to be surviving and even growing.

Despite the Era of Amazon.com, Indie Book Shops Rise Again

This one's by Jacob Chamberlain [on December 16, 2013](#) at *CommonDreams*, and while it's not directly on ebooks-vs.-pbooks, it's one of several stories I've seen indicating that bookstores—actual brick-and-mortar bookstores—aren't as doomed as some people believed. (I'll assert that physical bookstores only make sense given physical books; otherwise, they're cafés or gift shops.)

Unfortunately, the piece begins with a sentence I regard as factually flawed:

Even in the era of Amazon.com and the e-book, which have forced giant book-selling retail stores such as Borders to shutter their doors, underdog booksellers and local independent bookstores who offer a more nuanced approach to book sales are actually on the rise, [the Washington Post reports Sunday](#).

The *Post* article does *not* include the misleading assertion that Amazon “forced...Borders to shutter their doors.” Most analysts I've read say that Borders was poorly managed, with Amazon making it difficult to disguise the problems.

Anyway: Chamberlain's piece—which is pretty much an excerpted version of the *Post* article—notes that the American Booksellers Association membership grew 6.4% in 2013, that more bookstores are opening than are closing, that *good* indie bookstores are more than just bookstores—and that most readers are willing to read both e and p (stated badly here: “Roughly 64 percent of those polled in the U.S. pair both print and digital reading equally.” I can't get “pair both print and digital reading equally” to make sense as English; what the *Post* says is that 64% “prefer reading in both print and digital,” with nothing about “equally” involved).

Come to think of it, maybe you should just [read the Post story](#), which includes a couple of dozen comments (one of them a little too typical, ending “The Kindle, the iPod, the Tablet, the Nook. Brick and mortar stores of any consequence are done for.” Because Digital, I guess.).

And Not Or

Discussions related to different and sometimes complementary roles in a future with both ebooks and print books.

A Poignant Response to Books vs E-books,
Courtesy of Will Schwalbe

This [November 26, 2013 post](#) by Josh Hanagarne at *World's Strongest Librarian* is worth reading directly, and it's all about "and" rather than "vs."—but also special qualities of print books in some circumstances that are hard to replicate in digital form. The hard-headed digerati (if there are any of them that read C&I) will dismiss this as emotional claptrap, I suspect, but some of you will find the short piece (paraphrases from answers to a question at a panel discussion) worth reading.

No added commentary, and do note that the panelists were *not* putting down ebooks.

Print/Digital, Part the Whatevereth

As with much of this discussion, this [December 4, 2013](#) piece by John Scalzi at *Whatever* is anecdotal but interesting. Scalzi begins with a tweet from Joe Hill: "My 1st hint that eBooks weren't going to do to novels what MP3s did to CDs? All 3 of my electronics loving boys decline to read on a screen."

Scalzi notes that his daughter Athena "can and does read on a screen quite frequently" but loves print books and visiting bookstores to buy more of them. And this, which I suspect is true for some *but not all* readers:

She would better describe her own relationship with print and digital, but I suspect an either/or mentality about it would be puzzling to her. It would be asking her whatever her favorite soda is better in a bottle or a can. It's still her favorite soda regardless of packaging.

Apparently that's not quite true for Hill's sons. It's also, apparently, not quite true for Scalzi: he likes the physicality of books and buys digital copies partly because he travels a lot. He doesn't see a notable difference between the two reading modes.

Then there's this, which isn't about ebooks as such but struck me as interesting:

What I find myself really on board with the digital medium for is not books but magazines and comics. At the peak of my magazine subscribing career I subscribed to about fifteen magazines a month, and the pile of used magazines was, frankly, insane. Now I subscribe to Next Issue and it's pretty much a joy to zip through a dozen magazines on my Nexus 10 and not worry about dropping the issues into the recycling bin afterward. I feel the same way about comics and graphic novels — I read more episodic graphic storytelling now than I ever did before because Comixology makes it easy for me to find what I want to read and not have to worry

about the clutter afterward. I obviously don't have the collector mindset, here.

I don't read much in the way of graphic novels or comics at this point (although I have been rereading my collection of Pogo books and am about to start revisiting *Amphigorey*, *Amphigorey Too* and *Amphigorey Also*), but for me, magazines work ideally in print. I'm not even taking advantage of the free and expanded digital versions of the print magazines I read. I probably should be, but I *like* print magazines (and, other than a running 12-month collection of *Consumer Reports*, don't collect them). Heck, for me, 15 magazines would be pretty modest, although I may be down to that now. (Thinks: I subscribe to a dozen but get at least eight more as a consequence of memberships or as freebies. I have in the past subscribed to a *lot* more—at one point I took more than half a dozen computer-related magazines, for example, a number that's now down to zero.) As for actual books—I still mostly borrow them from the library, always in print form.

So different strokes, as usual: what works best for me isn't what works best for Scalzi isn't what works best for...

Nearly 100 comments. Most offer one person's preferences—frequently "both," a surprising number of "ebooks because there's no room for any more print books at home," some who've gone to ebooks as a Deliberate Philosophical Choice, a number of elderly who prefer ebooks because they can enlarge the type and two unsurprising outliers, one of the "in the future only the very wealthy will have print books" variety and one of the "DIGITAL INEVITABLE PRINT DOOMED!" variety. The second was particularly vapid.

E-Books Aren't Going to Make Print Obsolete Anytime Soon

This Seth Fiegerman piece, [on January 16, 2014](#) at *Mashable*, discusses a Pew Internet survey. In 2012, especially from *Mashable*, that headline might have been surprising. In 2014, not so much. The lede:

For all the talk about print books being replaced by digital books, the vast majority of readers in the U.S. still consume books the old-fashioned way.

Fiegerman does try to interpret reader/tablet sales growth (where he says "the data suggest that this [percentage of device ownership] will only continue to grow") as possibly heralding a change in reading preferences, but it seems like reaching.

I'd comment on the handful of comments but most seem to be translated badly from some other language, so I won't.

The unevenly distributed ebook future

This post, by Baldur Bjarnason [on January 16, 2014](#) at *Studio Tendra*, is part of a series on “the publishing industry's new product categories” and begins with a discursion on data, theory and experimentation that some of you will find more approachable than I did. (I'm in that awful position of doing stuff that I'd call research but without a hypothesis, theory or null hypothesis. It's descriptive research and that's not very reputable.)

That leads into a discussion of the tendency to think of Progress as being a two-dimensional timeline, past to present to future, and William Gibson's classic quote, “The future is already here—it's just not very evenly distributed.”

The problem with the line is that it's using the term *future* as a shorthand for technology and the changes it engenders—equating it with progress.

More importantly (I think), this:

The publishing industry has bought into this idea wholesale. Some publishing markets are, according to this worldview, further ahead on the progress timeline than others. It also implies that advancement along the timeline is inevitable, even if it progresses at varying speeds. Romance and other genre fiction tend to dominate ebook sales and so must have more 'future'. Non-fiction less so and must therefore have less 'future' and more of that crippling ballast called 'past'. Big mainstream titles hit the ebook market in seemingly unpredictable ways. Some garner decent ebook sales while others seem to sell only in print. There, the 'future' seems to be randomly distributed, like a stress nosebleed over a term paper.

This, obviously, implies that the ebook will either eventually dominate universally or at least capture the same large percentage uniformly across the market.

I don't think that's going to happen.

He says some publishing markets *will* switch entirely to ebooks, some will partially do so—and some won't do so much at all. (As far as I can see, he's an ebook person—but not an uncritical one.)

He notes the uselessness of broad generalizations about readers (even if they were true) and anticipates that some book titles just aren't going to sell—or even work—as ebooks. Whereas there are areas where print books will *only* make sense for titles that have sold well as ebooks, and maybe not even then.

This is inside-baseball stuff, aimed at the publishing industry, but it's worth reading. He's saying

there are many cases in which only print books make much sense—and other cases where print may become non-viable. And that publishers need to figure out which is which. Sounds about right.

Personal Preference

For true digital inevitabilists, personal preference doesn't matter. Either because The Kids Are All Digital or because us Luddites come to our senses, there's only one possible future and it's digital. Other observers—most of them these days, I think—actually pay attention to reader preferences and behavior, resulting in a more complex picture.

Almost 70% of Readers Will Not Abandon Print Books: Ricoh Study

This study, as reported by Dianna Dilworth [on December 9, 2013](#) at *GalleyCat*, strikes me as a bit peculiar. The study (the link to it is dead) says that some 70% of “consumers” think it unlikely that “they'll give up on printed books by 2016.” I'd love to see the questions in that study... “Are you planning to give up on printed books in the next three years?” seems leading, but that's probably not how it was worded.

The rest of the short item notes reasons for *preferring* print (an entirely different question unless you think it has to be one or the other), the no longer surprising finding that most college students prefer print textbooks to digital textbooks—and a truly odd one: “The study also claims that 60 percent of eBooks that are downloaded are not actually read.” Really? No comments available.

(There's another piece on this survey by Gary Price [on December 10, 2013](#) at *InfoDocket*, but while it includes some different text from the study, its link to the study itself is equally dead.)

College Students Still Prefer Print Textbooks

Another survey, reported by Teri Tan [on July 8, 2014](#) at *Publishers Weekly*—this one from the winter of 2014, conducted online by HP at San Jose State University, with 527 students responding, two-thirds of which have used both e-textbooks and print textbooks.

I'm guessing the headline above isn't the original headline, given that two of the comments question “College students prefer a mix” as a headline—57% preferred print, 21% wanted both and 21% preferred e-textbooks. (29% of the respondents were LIS students, which is interesting, but SJSU has a very large predominantly-online library school.) Younger students had *more* preference for print. Tan says:

So a 100% electronic-only publishing strategy, which is currently pursued by several major educational publishers, needs a rethink. Incorporating print-ready and on-demand deliverables into the publishing workflow is the smart (and easy) way to increase revenues from digital-only products.

The article also looks at reasons why people preferred either print or e and how much more they'd pay for a print textbook.

Breaking Taboos for All the Right Reasons

Barbara Fister's [April 16, 2014](#) "Library Babel Fish" column at *Inside Higher Ed* is about weeding—but also about paying attention to what users (in her case, primarily undergrad students) *want* when choosing formats. The lede:

Not too long ago at a gathering of librarians (I can't recall which, exactly) I overheard a snatch of something that sank in like a splinter. I didn't hear it clearly so I can't quite get it out, but it's bothering me. It was an exasperated statement to the effect that ebooks are a huge headache and students often prefer print, but libraries are no longer supposed to give up valuable space to books, so what should we do?

It's a Fister column, so my usual advice holds: Go read it and draw your own conclusions. As usual, she writes and thinks exceptionally well.

The first comment, from Bob Holley, notes that one major difference between public and academic libraries is that "academic libraries don't pay much attention to what users want," which isn't an option for mostly-locally-funded public libraries. It's a long and good comment, supporting Fister's column...and another commenter responds that their academic library "doesn't have the budget to purchase a book in multiple formats (public library materials are cheaper on average than academic materials)" and seems to justify only "buying" ebooks (that is, licensing ebooks) because those who really want print can use ILL. That economic argument is interesting; I wonder whether the writer has ever compared per capita funding for public libraries with per capita funding for academic libraries? I have. For 2011 in public libraries, median per capita spending was \$31, average was \$40. For 2010 in academic libraries, median per capita spending was \$278, average was \$529. Yes, public library materials may be cheaper, but still...

The Trouble with Digital

Some items focus on demonstrable issues with e-reading—and, in some cases, anecdotal or presumed issues that may or may not exist.

Tablets make it impossible for kids to get lost in a story

I have mixed feelings about this Asi Sharabi piece [on December 18, 2013](#) at *Quartz*. On one hand, the piece brings up legitimate issues about kids and full-fledged tablets: it's easy to be distracted by games and interactivity, which can (more likely *does*) interfere with "falling in love with stories." If it's true that fewer parents are reading to their kids at bedtime—you know, reading out loud from books—that's a shame, and is likely to reduce childhood literacy. If it's true that UK kids are reading more on screen than in print and are actually preferring online reading, that may be a bad thing, especially if it means fewer kids are early and advanced readers.

And, honestly, when a children's publisher hot for interactive "books" seems to say that readers *are* going digital—all of them, I guess—and that you need "reading experiences for touch-screen devices" so that "children will continue to read," I vary between despair and confidence that the publisher is deeply misguided.

But "make it impossible for kids to get lost in a story"? Not if the story's good enough and the kid's already a reader. While dedicated ereaders (without game distractions) and, for that matter, devices like Kindle Fires with parental controls that can lock out games during reading periods, do make it easier, I do believe that—for most readers young or old—a sufficiently compelling narrative will get you lost in a story no matter how you're reading (or listening to) it. And I say that as one who doesn't particularly want to read long-form narrative on a device.

A dry-eyed farewell to my Kindle

I link to [this January 7, 2014 column](#) by Jon Carroll, published in the *San Francisco Chronicle* and available on *SFGate*, with mild trepidation.

Not about the column itself; I've loved Jon Carroll's column ever since it began.

Not about the ideas in the column. Carroll's one of those who had apparently moved almost entirely to ebooks on his Kindle—and when the Kindle died, he thought about it...and moved back to print books. He explains why. He thinks print books *might*, in the long run, be insupportable because paper—but that's in the (very) long run. (Given that you can make paper from any long-grain fiber including kudzu and, I suspect, bamboo, and given the modest percentage of overall paper and cardboard usage that represents print books, I'm not sure it's true anyway.)

His reasons for liking (and rediscovering) print books are interesting and thoughtfully presented. There are 56 comments, pretty much the usual mix. (One reader who clearly didn't recognize that this was a *newspaper column* called it poorly written because Carroll included a brief review of an Oakland restaurant.) Didn't read them all.

So what's my mild trepidation? *SFGate* has become, like some other newspaper website, nearly unusable because of ad overload and other factors—with the screen moving up and down as new ads appear and disappear, with lengthy pauses while ever-more-intrusive video ads are added, with...anyway, the site's a mess. Which is too bad.

Why the Smart Reading Device of the Future May Be...Paper

This Brandon Keim article [from May 1, 2014](#) is particularly interesting for its venue: *Wired*, which I stopped reading largely because it was so rah-rah Digital Everything Linear Future in its approach.

Paper books were supposed to be dead by now. For years, information theorists, marketers, and early adopters have told us their demise was imminent. Ikea even redesigned a bookshelf to hold something other than books. Yet in a world of screen ubiquity, many people still prefer to do their serious reading on paper.

Huh. That's funny. The apparently-knowledgeable commentator at *The Guardian* assures us that predictions were for ebooks to gain 25% or so of the book market...but, of course, what this lede says (the first two sentences) is what *Wired* and so many pundits have been saying for a long time.

Keim's neither a Luddite nor an e-avoider (I mean, he is writing for *Wired*): "I e-read often" and loves to read science fiction on his Kindle Paperwhite late at night.

What I've read on screen seems slippery, though. When I later recall it, the text is slightly translucent in my mind's eye. It's as if my brain better absorbs what's presented on paper. Pixels just don't seem to stick. And often I've found myself wondering, why might that be?

He reviews some of the research (you'll find loads of links in the article) and, fairly early on, comes to this sensible conclusion:

Maybe it's time to start thinking of paper and screens another way: not as an old technology and its inevitable replacement, but as different and complementary interfaces, each stimulating particular modes of thinking. Maybe paper is a technology uniquely suited for imbibing novels and essays and

complex narratives, just as screens are for browsing and scanning.

I'd add to that that personal preference is also involved (especially when people make a big point of Stopping Reading Those Nasty Old Dead-Tree Books), but that's a different discussion.

The article's worth reading and if you follow all the links you'll probably learn something. Keim does discuss preferences later on—for example, if a student prefers ereading, they'll learn less when required to read from paper (and vice-versa).

The article suggests that the science isn't settled yet, and I suspect that it may never be entirely settled. Will ebooks get to the place where they're as good for deep reading (*for most readers*) as print books? Maybe it won't matter; maybe, just maybe, there's room for whatever format a reader prefers.

As to the comments...well, it's *Wired*. Need I say more? Some agreement, some snark, some "ebooks are SO much better/print books are dead and good riddance" comments that feel as though they were written a decade ago and trotted out whenever needed. Some folks calling Keim a Luddite. A ~~surprising~~ number of commenters apparently didn't bother to read the article (where Keim *clearly* sees a future for both ebooks and print books) and "respond" to their assumption that he's calling for an end to ebooks.

What's the matter with e-books?

Here we have it—by Natalie Binder [on January 16, 2014](#) at *N.V. Binder*: a piece that says there's a real risk that *ebooks* will disappear in the next decade. Or, in her own words:

It's too early to sing a dirge for e-books, but the idea that e-books will ever supplant printed books is fading fast. Some people think (hope?) the market is merely settling or stabilizing. That is now the best-case scenario for e-book publishers. They may be right, but I doubt it. I think the e-book gold rush is coming to an end. The real risk to publishers isn't that print will disappear in the next decade, but that e-books will.

In the first sentence, she says it's too early—but in the last, she's at least considering it to be a real risk. Although what she's *really* saying is this:

I just don't think print is outdated. And I think e, in the pure, .mobi or .epub sense, might be.

I've skipped over the first part of the post, which notes sobering figures from AAP's 2013 annual report: overall ebook sales down around 5% (which may be negligible but is quite a contrast from the big growth years), hardback sales *up* 10%, and—

most worrying for ebook folks—sales of childrens’ and YA ebooks down *40 percent from 2012*. Binder emphasizes that, with some justification: that’s an awfully big drop, especially to those who still think that The Kids These Days only read ebooks.

There’s a mystifying paragraph here:

E-book advocates have begun writing the same editorials that legacy publishers were writing in 2010, and newspapers were writing in 2000, and librarians have been writing since the telephone was invented. The march into the inevitable electronic future has stalled.

I don’t think there have been *that* many librarians (as opposed to futurists who know nothing about libraries) writing elegies for the library “since the telephone was invented,” although there have certainly been (and still are) a few.

Binder asks a somewhat novel question: “What functions make an e-book better than a printed book, that the open web can’t do better than both?”

She notes some of the virtues of print books over ebooks. As for ebooks, she says everything they can do, the open web can do better.

When you get down to the code level, an e-book (as in a .mobi or .epub format) is just a webpage. A webpage with weird formatting and restrictive DRM. A webpage that costs a lot of money. A webpage that is tied to a single device and a single user; that can’t be crawled by a normal search engine; that can’t be copied or shared or linked to; that can’t even be bought.

Why would someone do this to perfectly good HTML? Because someone wanted to make webpages that look similar enough to real books that book buyers will pay book prices for them. The sales pitch for e-books is that they’re just like printed books, except they’re electronic. The whole e-book concept hangs on a shallow view of innovation that suggests that all things digital will replace all things analog, *because digital*.

But that’s not true. Where digital media has replaced physical media, it’s because the digital thing is better, not because it’s digital or electronic. MP3s are better than CDs—not because they’re digital, but because you can buy one song at a time. DVDs are better than VHS tapes—not because they’re electronic, but because you don’t have to rewind them, the cases are thinner, and they have special features.

I like that third paragraph (although, of course, *CDs are digital, dammit*) and *love* most of the final sentence of the second paragraph. (I’m not so sure that’s the only thing behind ebooks, but it’s a dis-

troublingly common view: “all things digital will replace all things analog *because digital*.”

I’m sympathetic to what follows—that trying to make ebooks more and more like print books is a losing proposition. I’m less convinced that we’ll have all sorts of wonderful “narrative innovation” if we just rely on the open web. Maybe it will happen; maybe not.

But here’s the thing: whether it happens or not, it won’t *replace* text-only linear-narrative books. Binder may be right that it’s unlikely to happen on dedicated ereaders. Will it happen on the open web? There’s a money issue that won’t go away readily, but there’s mostly an issue of...well, consider the vast success of hypertext. Creating a new narrative form is *hard*. Making money from it may be even harder. Doesn’t mean it won’t happen. Certainly means—to my mind—that existing linear-narrative forms (which have been around a lot longer than books, by the way) will not disappear.

Is the end nigh for the e-book?

What a wonderful title, the succinct (and, in my opinion, silly) reverse of the old Death-of-Books platitudes.

I’d excerpt and discuss this July 2014 (I think) article in *The Irish Times*...except that the site made a friendly change to improve subscriber access, or something. To wit, the article is now solidly behind a paywall. Such is e-reading, all too often.

I’m skipping a couple of brief articles referring to yet more studies showing that (most?) people comprehend and retain material better when they read it in print form. Not because I doubt the studies but because there have been so many of them.

E-Books Are Damaging Your Health: Why We Should All Start Reading Paper Books Again

I must admit that my immediate reaction on seeing that headline—on [a January 11, 2015](#) piece by Lecia Bushak at *Medical Daily*—was pretty much how I used to react to David “Teleread” Rothman’s screeds at Teleread: “Oh, give me a –ing break” (although, unlike Mr. Tulip in *The Truth*, I substituted an impolite four-letter word for that em-dash). Except the nonsense is on the other side this time around.

I should note up front that this is labeled “Opinion.” I offer no opinion on the *bona fides* of *Medical Daily*; it’s a web-journalism site run by media people with no apparent medical training, but since I’m writing a library-oriented ejournal while having no library degree, who am I to quibble?

Bushak begins with notes on how reading may improve your mind and maybe make you more empathetic, followed by this:

So the act of reading is great, of course. But the way you're reading also has an impact on your physical and mental health. In our technology-driven world, the paper book has been replaced by electronic devices—Kindles and Nooks, and even reading on your laptop or smartphone. Good old-fashioned books are no longer seen as practical. [Emphasis added.]

“Has been replaced”? “No longer seen as practical?” Sez who? I see this enormous digital straw man showing itself...

Then we get anecdota: Bushak found that reading before bed—from a print book—while drinking chamomile tea not only relaxed her but made it easier to fall asleep and to wake up feeling refreshed. And the kicker:

Researchers have been examining the differences between reading regular books and e-books for years. Many of the studies have shown that reading old-fashioned books has plenty of advantages over e-books, which can be gateways to other electronic distractions, all of which screw with your sleep. This is why you should ditch the screen for printed pages.

There's a *lot* going on in that paragraph, none of which supports the claim in the title and very little of which supports the notion that you should “ditch the screen” (as opposed to being a sane human being who uses different media when and as they're most appropriate).

She details her reasons. Briefly, “you're missing out on important information,” which mixes notes on recall with the concept that *reading in digital form itself* makes the act of reading fragmented—even if you're reading on a pure ereader; “e-books get in the way of sleepyttime” which, as you can probably guess, is all about the backlighting on *tablets and phones* and has nothing whatsoever to do with ebooks themselves; “screens = stress,” *again* entirely about phones and notebooks and the like; and...well, she closes with more anecdota about her own habits.

It's clear that she doesn't consider ebooks to be “real books” no matter how you read them, and that she only finds she can “enter someone else's world” in a printed book. In the end, the whole discussion boils down to “multifunction devices can be distracting, and blue light's not great at bedtime.” Oh, and this is one of those websites that interposes BIG SCREENWIDE PICTURES between chunks of text

so that sustained in-depth reading becomes very difficult. So my recall of the text may not be as good as if I'd read it in *Medical Daily Magazine*. Which does not, of course, exist.

Sad, really. But then, one-sided discussions can be that way.

The Trouble with Print

There continue to be some folks who *know* that print's dead or dying.

Paper vs digital reading is an exhausted debate

I love that title for [this March 31, 2014](#) Nick Harkaway blog post on *The Guardian's* Books blog...but as I read the post, Hardaway's saying the debate is exhausted Because Digital. He's mostly putting down a prediction from Tim Waterstone (founder of a major UK bookshop chain) that the share of the book market taken up by ebooks is likely to decline in the UK, as it did in 2013 in the U.S.

Waterstone wasn't saying ebooks were doomed (he's developing a subscription service for short-form ereading, which hardly sounds like the actions of a true digiphobe); he is saying that the “ebook revolution” has been overhyped and that print books will still be around 40 years from now.

Seems sensible to me, but for Harkaway, somehow the use of SMS to feed Kenyan farmers information has Deep Implications for the future of ebooks. Indeed, “because digital” comes very close to his own language:

Digital will continue to grow for a while at least, and continue to exist, because it is becoming part of the world we inhabit at a level below our notice, no more remarkable than roads or supermarkets. Ebooks are here to stay because digital is, and quite shortly we'll stop having this debate about paper vs ebooks because it will no longer make a lot of sense.

Harkaway admits that physical books still have a role, but appears disappointed and (I may be overreading this) hopes that ebooks will conquer all.

His real concern seems to be the UK's apparent governmental hostility to public libraries, not helped by the apparent failure of UK public libraries (unlike U.S. libraries) to maintain and build strong usage bases and community involvement. That's a different argument, one where I'd probably agree.

There were 141 comments before the discussion was closed, but right off the bat we get, well, the second comment, from One Who Knows:

Digital means the end of hardcopy books. It means the end of bookshops and the end of libraries.

This cultural disaster is happening. And appeasers only benefit the case for the e-reader.

In the future there will be no profit to be had for publishing houses in producing hardcopy books. Therefore they will stop.

That first paragraph is remarkably straightforward “because digital” nonsense, tossing libraries into the equation. A bit later we get some jackass who “worked in libraries for a decade” and judges them thusly:

[M]y experience is of a third rate service that is completely superseded by tablets and smartphones which allow people massively wider access to information than libraries ever provided, and without the paternalistic moralising.

Whew.

Fascinating that one commentator now claims that ebooks leveling off at 25% or so of total book sales is “exactly as was predicted when they were first introduced.” Right. And of course the spate of “ever since I got my Kindle, no more print books for me, ever again” converts, some of whom seem to think that what they prefer *must* be what everyone prefers.

Books Suck: Why I Love My Kindle More Than Dead Trees

This piece by Harry Guinness appeared [December 22, 2014](#) at *makeuseof*—and, given the contributor’s picture (which looks like something out of a Monty-Python-Makes-Fun-Of-Canadians sketch) and the text itself, I can’t tell if it’s a put-on or if Guinness is serious. If he’s serious, it’s a lovely late example of the extreme anti-print-book stance. Which, I’d guess, you can figure out from the title.

A warning: this site is so riddled with ads to the side of and in between text that you may find it truly annoying to read. Or, for that matter, you may find it annoying to read because Guinness is annoying: I dunno.

I love to read. I’m never happier than when I’m nose deep in a good novel.

I could say that I love books but that would be wrong. I love stories, the written word, a well woven tale or a carefully crafted thesis. But books? I can’t bloody stand books.

That’s the start. A bit later he says “reading an eBook is a million times better than reading a printed book,” so at least you know we’re not dealing with hyperbole here. He says it’s a “settled debate,” and says the “last refuge of the luddite” (that is, somebody who reads those narsty print books) is emotion.

He digresses to tell us that Spotify will give music lovers “far higher quality” than vinyl—which is,

honestly, the first time I’ve seen somebody suggest that a streaming service offers *better sound quality* than vinyl or CDs (a later paragraph suggests that Guinness believes the latter as well).

Basically, Guinness simply denies any actual advantages to print reading and is apparently given to dropping heavy hardcover books on his face, which means that for him an ereader is superior. And, you know, a convincing paragraph like this:

I’m not some tech-loving writer who can’t stand books because they’re old. I’m a tech-loving writer who can’t stand books because they’re awful. Ten years ago, I loved books because the alternative was scrolls. Now that there are e-readers, it’s time to move on, accept the advances of modernity and realise just because something is old, doesn’t mean it’s good.

I love the last sentence: because something is new, it *of course* must be better...that’s what “accept the advances of modernity” boils down to.

Seventy comments, many of them by Guinness, during which we learn that he *loves* being locked in to Amazon and doesn’t care about DRM and that he’s sort of a...well, given to! lots of! that! and not paying any attention to anybody else’s preferences. He admits the rant is a polemic, but that dignifies the rant considerably.

Ah, well, I see this clown has a much more recent post where he touts “the end of ownership,” in which he says—among other things—that buying a printed book is really *the same* as licensing content, it’s “simply your license to view the contents in perpetuity.” Because, you know, it would be illegal to sell the book or...oh, wait...

He increasingly comes off as a paid spokesperson for Spotify—or just as a young jackass.

The Trouble with Journalism

I’m using this tag for items where the title and the text seem somewhat at odds with one another.

Pew Internet Releases New Report: “E-Reading Rises as Device Ownership Jumps”

This Gary Price item [published January 16, 2014](#) at *Infodocket* is interesting partly because of the choice of what to highlight from the report—and now that I’ve clicked through to Pew Research Center’s [report summary](#), I see that I was about to blame Price for what was actually the odd editorial decision of Lee Rainie (from whom I’d expect it, since he has pretty much consistently touted Digital Everything) and Kathryn Zickuhr (who I have no past experience with).

Not that the quoted phrase isn't supported by the survey. It is—with asterisks. Let's get the Big Asterisk out of the way first: the survey involved 1,005 adults and has a 3.4% margin of error—which means that results from different years that are up to 6.8% different *may not represent any actual difference at all*.

Keep that in mind.

Now, here's what we see: for “read at least one book in the past year,” the total went from 79% in 2011 to 74% in 2012 to 76% in 2013. *Consumer Reports* would make a point of noting that those differences may not be meaningful. But, of course, that isn't The Story or at least The Headline. The Headline is that the ebook figure, which rose from 17% to 23% between 2011 and 2012, rose further to 28% in 2013. There's probably a real difference between the 2011 and 2013 figures (and certainly *should* be, given massive increases in ereader and tablet ownership!), and possibly a real difference between 2012 and 2013. Oh, as for print books? Down from 71% in 2011 to 65% in 2012, then up to 69% in 2013. There's certainly no significant difference between the 2011 and 2013 figures...any more than it would be useful for me to point out that the increase in print book readership is essentially the same as that in ebook readership (4% vs. 5% where the margin of error is 3.4%). So you could reword this as “book reading in general rises as device ownership jumps,” but what fun would that be?

The summary itself seems reasonably fair. As it notes, “print remains the foundation of Americans' reading habits”—very much so, since most people who read ebooks *also* read print books (4% of readers are ebook only, while a majority of print book readers don't read ebooks).

But, see, we went from 24% of adults owning dedicated ereaders at the end of 2012 to 32% owning them at the end of 2013—a much bigger jump than the jump in ebook reading. And tablets went from 34% to 42%, oddly enough the same percentage increase. (This survey seems to say that only 75% of adults have laptop or desktop computers. I find that low, but what do I know?)

Here's an astonishing finding: people who own dedicated e-readers are very likely to read ebooks on those readers. Who woulda' guessed? (Yes, we use our Kindle Fire HD—which probably qualifies as a tablet rather than an ereader—primarily to read our daily paper, but we've both read at least one book on it.) Indeed, if I thought the small percentage differences were important, I might be astonished that,

apparently, one-eighth of those who own ereaders *don't* read ebooks on them—and (given that 50% of adults own one or the other) nearly half of people who own tablets and ereaders don't read ebooks on them, even though more than three-quarters of all adults *do* read books.

The poll itself says that reading remains strong (apparently the number of books read hasn't changed much—a median of 5 and a mean of 12), which is great. And that a growth of one-third in ereader ownership (from 24% to 32%, four-thirds as much) only results in a growth of less than one-quarter in ebook readership (from 23% to 28%, 122% as much). Which may help explain why ebook sales have flatlined and possibly decreased. Another alternate headline: “Ebook reading rises more slowly than ereader ownership.” (I changed to “ebook reading” from “e-reading” because, damn, I do lots and lots and lots of e-reading, almost none of which is ebook reading.)

Ebooks Finding Their Place Among Young Readers This [January 9, 2015](#) piece by Rich Bellis at *digitalbookworld* seems at first glance to be at odds with other items—and even with itself.

In the first paragraph, it says “young readers may not be flocking to ebooks in droves” while in the second it says “93% of children aged 2-13 now read an e-book at least once a week” (about the same as in the year before) and, later, “about two-thirds [of children] read e-books in January 2014 and January 2015 alike.” (Amazing: A January 9, 2015 post telling us what children did in all of January 2015!)

Meanwhile, Bellis also notes a Scholastic study that says 61% of children have read an e-book *some time*, and that 77% of children who have read an e-book say they mostly read print books—with two-thirds of children saying they'll always want to read print books.

A bit later, you get a *digitalbookworld* person asserting “the fact that children prefer digital” (a fact that appears unique to this person or to *digitalbookworld*, since it contradicts pretty much everybody else's studies) and another person whose business appears to depend on ebooks asserting that, you know, those *younger* kids in the Scholastic study aren't quite digital enough and “may be more resistant to switching,” even though Scholastic found the *strongest* preference for print books among the youngest people studied.

So what the heck is actually going on here? Several things:

- **Consider the source:** *digitalbookworld*.
- **Look at the survey:** I couldn't find a direct link to the 2015 survey itself—but I did find [this link](#), the last pages of which appear to be an extended summary of the latest survey's finding, and it includes one absolutely critical sentence:

The 2015 report is based on the results of a survey conducted in October 2014 with 752 parents of children who e-read. [Emphasis added.]

Whoops. So the 93% figure is based on a survey *limited to parents of children who "e-read,"* however that's defined. And it appears that the survey is actually saying that 93% of kids *who e-read* do so at least once a week, not that 93% of them read at least one e-book per week. In other words:

News flash: A survey of adults who identify themselves as exercisers found that 93% of them reported doing some exercise last week. Details to follow.

I have my own thoughts about the phrase "more resistant to switching," but since those thoughts involve the Borg, I'll set them aside.

The Differences

Some discussions don't come down on one "side" or the other, but rather focus on actual differences between print reading and ereading.

How Do E-Books Change the Reading Experience?

This one's a debate of sorts, by Mohsin Hamid and Anna Holmes [on December 31, 2013](#) at the *New York Times Book Review*.

Hamid (in Pakistan) begins, offering some advantages of ebooks but saying that he finds he often prefers p-reading. (Arggh...)

Anyway, back to Hamid's reasons for preferring print. It's part of his attempts to "question manufactured desires"—he hides the browser on his mobile phone and uses pull rather than push on email. (I've found an even better way to avoid constant interruption temptations from a smartphone: I don't own one. But never mind...)

Time is our most precious currency. So it's significant that we are being encouraged, wherever possible, to think of our attention not as expenditure but as consumption. This blurring of labor and entertainment forms the basis, for example, of the financial alchemy that conjures deca-billion-dollar valuations for social-networking companies.

I crave technology, connectivity. But I crave solitude too...

In a world of intrusive technology, we must engage in a kind of struggle if we wish to sustain moments

of solitude. E-reading opens the door to distraction. It invites connectivity and clicking and purchasing. The closed network of a printed book, on the other hand, seems to offer greater serenity. It harks back to a pre-jacked-in age. Cloth, paper, ink: For these read helmet, cuirass, shield. They afford a degree of protection and make possible a less intermediated, less fractured experience. They guard our aloneness. That is why I love them, and why I read printed books still.

I'd suggest that dedicated ereaders do very little to distract, but I hear what he's saying.

Then there's Anna Holmes, who begins:

When my second book was released this past October, I told anyone who would listen not to buy the electronic version.

This was not so much a dig at the publishing house production managers who converted my creation into e-book form as it was an acknowledgment of the medium's many limitations. You see, no matter how fancy the refinements made to, say, Apple's much heralded Retina display or Amazon's electronic ink, an e-book offers little promise of discovery or wonder. Browsers may be ubiquitous in our e-portal age, but an e-book doesn't encourage actual browsing.

Amazon's electronic ink? I wasn't aware that Amazon invented e...oh, never mind. As with Hamid, Holmes certainly reads ebooks—but "I have yet to feel as fully invested in the pixels on a Bezos-imagined screen as I do in the indelible glyphs found on good old-fashioned book paper."

Part of that is distractions. Another bit is page numbering and sense memory. There's a third—"performative limitations"—that you'll have to read in the original; I couldn't get much out of it other than the idea that you judge a person by looking through the books on their bookshelves.

This odd pair doesn't constitute a debate—the two writers seem to be saying the same things in slightly different terms—and I wonder whether either one really addresses the question.

More than three hundred comments. I didn't attempt to read them all, but did read the 20 or so selected by the *Times*. Several discussed the benefits of ebooks for people with various reading problems; several understood that both of the writers *do* read both ebooks and pbooks and were similarly open-minded, a couple of people (one former bookstore owner who's given up libraries because she had a bad experience with one book) who basically assert the utter superiority of ebooks...and then there was an Instant Convert who ends his comment with these remarkable statement:

I think that the e-reader is a revolution in reading comparable to the revolution affected by the invention of the printing press.

Equally important, e-readers must be distributed to everyone in America whether the person is rich, destitute, and anything in between. Not to do so would be cruel and criminal; and also would be damaging to the short and long run developments of our national culture and our economic viability.

Right.

Form, Function, and Books

Consider [this January 12, 2014 post](#) by Marcus Banks at *Marcus' World*. Banks saw a sign in an indie bookstore window that I'd consider amusing and deliberately silly (it has lots of silly dingbats surrounding its simple message: "We sell only old-fashioned real books made with actual paper held together with either hard or soft binding * Accept no substitutes") but that Banks found "needlessly antagonistic." Whew.

Banks professes his love of print books (he's a bookseller, among other things, and has "many books on my nightstand") but also reads lots of books on his iPad.

Paper has its charms, as do pixels. Worries that printed books are going away are overblown. Radio is still here in the age of TV and movies, because they serve different functions. The print book is a marvelous piece of technology. Book lovers need not be so territorial and line-drawing; books have enough virtue, as physical objects, to speak for themselves.

But...he goes on to essentially dismiss *any* difference between print books and ebooks in conveying a story, which I think overstates the case. And Banks wants more:

Future Goulds and Munros will have the exhilarating opportunity to tell a story in a way that does not need to be crystallized into the 2 dimensions of paper. That's a good thing, too, because we live in a three dimensional world. In the future, I hope that reading books becomes an immersive experience that speaks to all the senses.

He expects to get more, too: "We are simply developing new and interesting ways to tell our stories." Maybe so, but it seems to me that Banks is talking about *movies* (perhaps with smell-o-vision added to speak to another sense), or maybe "VRbooks" if virtual reality is ever widely adopted. I'm a whole lot less convinced that multimedia "books" are either a natural development or likely to supplant text-only books for immersive story-telling. A good story lets

the *reader* fill in the pieces with their own images, sounds and other senses; maybe that's why—many years after some folks said that all books *needed* to be singing and dancing—there's still a huge place for text-only books.

I agree with Banks that there's room for both. I doubt that we'll see huge innovations in multimedia storytelling massively replace text-only, *especially* if it's to be delivered by tablets, just as hypertext fiction really hasn't gotten anywhere. But, of course, I could be wrong.

And, frankly, I think Banks was taking that little sign in the bookstore window *way* too seriously. Somebody trying to make a serious point doesn't use a dozen dingbats with 21 words.

Paper versus screens

Here's an interesting one, by Richard Watson [on January 16, 2014](#) at *What's Next: Top Trends*. It's interesting because Watson is a futurist (one who created an "extinction timeline" that had libraries extinct by 2019, as well as landlines extinct by 2011 and newspaper delivery extinct by 2012—he later admitted that "I got it totally wrong. Probably.") who, remarkably, still seems to think that print books are largely irrelevant for the future (at least as of 2012). It's also interesting because, especially given the source, it provides a rejoinder of sorts to Marcus Banks and others who argue that the medium is entirely irrelevant.

The post notes recent research suggesting that e-reading may inhibit comprehension and that there are other virtues to print books.

There is also the idea, rarely recognised, that people bring less mental effort to screens in the first place. A study by Ziming Lui at San Jose State University found that people reading on screens use a lot of shortcuts and spend time browsing or scanning for things not directly linked to the text. Another piece of research (Kate Garland/University of Leicester) makes the key point that people reading on a screen rely much more on remembering the text compared to people reading on paper who rely much more on understanding what the text means. This distinction between remembering and knowing is especially critical in education.

Research by Julia Parrish-Morris and colleagues (now at the University of Pennsylvania) found that three to five-year old children reading stories from interactive books spent much of their time being distracted by buttons and easily lost track of the narrative and what it meant. Clearly screens have considerable advantages. Convenience or fast access to information is one. For older or visually im-

paired readers the ability to change font size is another. But it is precisely the simplicity and uncomplicated nature of paper that makes it so special. Paper does not draw attention to itself. It does not contain hyperlinks or other forms of easy distraction and its tactile and sensory nature is not only pleasing but actually allows us to navigate and understand the text.

Only three comments, two from the same “orkneylad” with a response from Watson in the middle—but the first and longest is interesting: it’s a 1996 quote from Umberto Eco. You can read it in the original. Watson’s response: “That’s much better than my post!”

Your paper brain and your Kindle brain aren’t the same thing

This story first aired as part of *The Takeaway*, apparently [on September 18, 2014](#). I dislike the lead paragraph:

Would you like paper or plasma? That’s the question book lovers face now that e-reading has gone mainstream. And, as it turns out, our brains process digital reading very differently..

Why do I dislike it? Because the choice isn’t “paper or plasma”—it’s paper or *pixels*. Unless you read your books on certain brands of HDTV, there is no way you’re going to read a book via plasma: the technology just isn’t used in handheld devices.

I know, I know...but damn, it’s public radio, and you’d expect a little more fact-checking. (I listen to *The Takeaway* at times, since it replaced *Talk of the Nation*, and I’ll just say that some replacements are definitely not upgrades.)

The gist: A growing number of studies suggest that paper is better suited to deep reading, even on a neurological level. There are some links to studies. Didn’t read all of the mixed-lot comments.

Conclusions?

The [September 2011 issue of *Cites & Insights*](#), shortly before I ~~almost came to my senses~~ shut down this ejournal permanently, almost entirely consisted of WRITING ABOUT READING: A FUTURE OF BOOKS AND PUBLISHING. While most of that essay was like this one—excerpts from and comments on other people’s thoughts and findings on ebooks and pbooks—I began with “What Could Happen,” the source of the essay’s title. This prefatory section offered my own projections (hopes as much as predictions) for where things might stand in ten years (that is, 2021) and 35 years (that is, 2046). I didn’t anticipate that

C&I would be around long enough for me to check up in either case; now I’m less certain.

If I was writing that piece today, I’d change some of the pure guesses to likely predictions, omit one or two that now seem wrong...and stick with the set of things “of which I have no doubt whatsoever,” all of which seem even *more* probable now than in 2011.

Rather than adding at least three pages to this already overlong essay reprinting and annotating that 2011 section, I’ll suggest that you read it yourself and draw your own conclusions.

I’ve never claimed to be a futurist (and still don’t), but at this point predicting a continued major role for public libraries as print-book circulators (among other things), continued cases of “death of” overstatements, the continued health of long-form reading and the continued presence of collector-quality print books seems like predicting that the Earth will continue to rotate around the Sun.

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Masthead

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