

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large/Online Edition

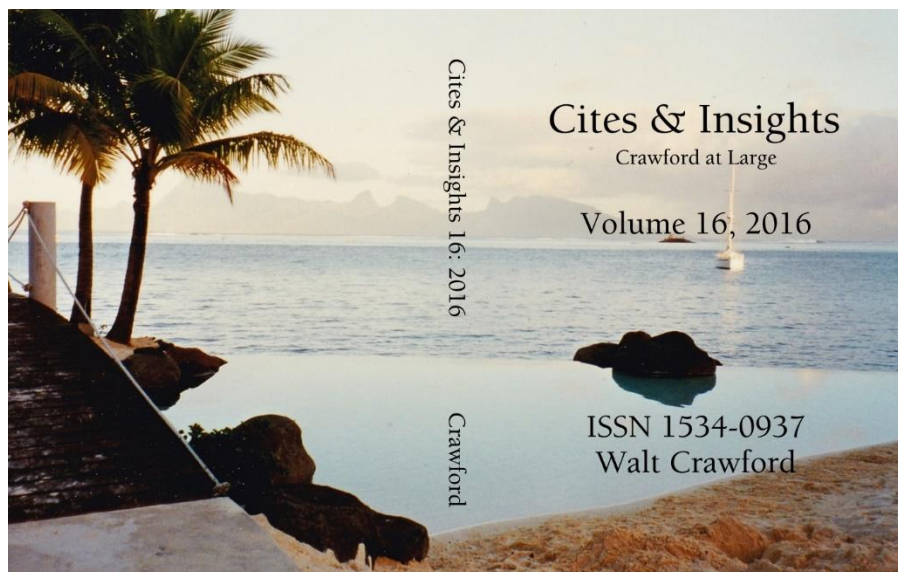
Libraries • Policy • Technology • Media

Volume 17, Number 2: February 2017

ISSN 1534-0937

The Front

Cites & Insights 16 Published



The paperback annual for *Cites & Insights* 16:2016 is now available. It's a relatively slender volume, and the last 8.5" x 11" annual. You can see summaries for all of the annual editions on the [Cites & Insights Annual Volumes](#) page or go directly to [the Lulu order page](#).

Inside This Issue

Technology.....	4
The Back.....	18

Highlights of this shorter-than-usual 9-issue volume include:

- Three full-issue (or nearly full-issue) essays related to Open Access: Economics and Access, a brief version of Gold Open Access Journals 2011-2015, and Ethics and Access

- PPPPredatory Article Counts- and "Trust Me"-precursors to the January 2017 Gray Open Access 2012-2016
- The usual: Media, Ebooks & Pbooks; and more

And the indices that aren't otherwise available.

All eleven annual volumes (beginning with 2006) have also been reduced to \$35 each, a price that will hold as long as there's any activity. All profits from these sales are considered contributions toward keeping C&I going.

The photo (taken by Linda Driver, my wife and the professional librarian in the household) was taken in Papeete, Tahiti; it's scanned from the same original photo used for the cover of *Balanced Libraries*—but in addition to being larger, this version is sharper and has better color balance.

Going BY

Ever since 2003, *Cites & Insights* has carried a Creative Commons BY-NC license (attribution-noncommercial). More recently, I spelled out just how liberally I interpreted “noncommercial.” But NC has always been a little difficult. So, as of this issue (and, realistically, retroactively to 2001), *Cites & Insights* is CC BY: Attribution required.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Readership Notes

Readership notes for 2016 are a little shaky: numbers for November 13-December 15 are missing in all but a few cases (and are missing in all cases for November 13-30).

That said, there were 101,391 downloads during 2016—down from 2015, but still healthy, and if you assume 8% missing data, down very little.

Issue	Count
civ16i4.pdf	3,925
civ16i3.pdf	2,067
civ16i2.pdf	1,849
civ16i8.pdf	1,257
civ16i5.pdf	1,139
civ16i1.pdf	1,126
civ16i7.pdf	910
civ16i6.pdf	722
civ17i1.pdf	601
civ16i9.pdf	208

Table 1. 2016 issues

Table 1 shows all issues published in 2016 (including 17:1, *Gray Open Access*). The two most popular issues had more downloads than the two most popular 2015 issues. The only really poor showing was a two-page placeholder issue—and that was also the one most affected by November-December logging problems. Themes of the most popular issues: Two Worlds of Gold OA: APCLand and OAWorld (there was also a Google Books essay, but I’m pretty sure the first one was the big draw) and “Trust Me”: The Other Problem with Beall’s Lists (and several other essays).

Issue	Count
civ14i4.pdf	4,670
civ14i7.pdf	2,090
civ15i9.pdf	1,382
civ10i8.pdf	1,350
civ6i2.pdf	1,213
civ9i2.pdf	1,056

Table 2. Most-downloaded non-2016 issues in 2016

Table 2 shows the other issues with more than 1,000 downloads in 2016. Only one of these was not also in the 2015 most-downloaded table: 9:2, “A was for AAC”—an unusual issue.

Issue	Count
civ14i4.pdf	15,936
civ10i8.pdf	8,546
civ6i10.pdf	7,979
civ14i7.pdf	7,576
civ8i7.pdf	6,488
civ12i2.pdf	6,308
civ9i11.pdf	6,042
civ12i8.pdf	5,557
civ9i5.pdf	5,125
civ14i5.pdf	5,094
civ9i2.pdf	4,862
civ11i1.pdf	4,790
civ15i9.pdf	4,517
civ9i4.pdf	4,266
civ14i1.pdf	4,209
civ13i6.pdf	4,122
civ7i12.pdf	4,095
civ8i1.pdf	4,071

Table 3. Issues with more than 4,000 downloads since October 2013

Finally, here’s the list of issues downloaded at least 4,000 times from October 2013 to date. That’s now 18 issues, up from 11 at the end of 2015.

A Tech Miscellany

What's the difference between this and THE BACK? It's not in the back of the issue and some items may be less snarky. What unites them: I tagged them as "tech" and did that tagging before 2013 (newer stuff may appear later). But first...

The Bandwidth of a 747, Take 3

Six years ago, there was an extended multipart discussion regarding the bandwidth of a 747 (cargo version) full of discs flying from New York to Los Angeles. (You can look it up.)

I thought it might be fun to revisit this with current storage media. As before, I use a 747-8F, the most capacious cargo airplane that exists in multiple instances. (There's an Antonov jet with nearly twice the capacity, but there's only one of them. One jet, not one model.)

I looked at four storage media:

- **BDXL three-layer write-once Blu-ray discs**, 128 GB capacity. I assume these would be shipped on 100-disc spindles with covers. That appears to mean a size of 5" x 6.5" x 5" or 62.5 cubic inches and a weight of 3.6 pounds. (For comparability, all sizes and weights are taken from Amazon specifications.) That gets you 12.8 terabytes (TB) of storage.
- **Internal consumer-grade hard discs**. Current capacity tops out at 6TB; size is 4" x 5.79" x 1.03" or 23.8 cubic inches. Weight is 1.0 pounds.
- **Internal consumer-grade solid-state drives**. Current capacity appears to top out at 4TB; size is 2.76" x 3.94" x 0.27" or 2.94 cubic inches. Weight is 1.87 ounces.
- **SDHC memory cards**. Current capacity appears to top out at 512GB; size is 0.94" x 1.25" x 0.08" or 0.094 cubic inches. Weight is 0.32 ounces.

The 747-8F has a cargo capacity of 295,000 pounds and 30,777 cubic feet. As it turns out, weight is *always* the limiting factor: a 747-8F actually *full* of any of these storage devices would not be able to take off.

I figure 4 hours and 47 minutes or 17,220 seconds from JFK to LAX.

Here's what I come up with (full precision for calculations, rounded for display):

	BDXL	Hard Disk	SSD	SDHC
Size, CF	0.03617	0.01377	0.00170	0.00005
Weight, lb	3.600	1.00	0.117	0.02
Capacity in terabytes	12.8	6	4	0.5
Petabytes by space	10,679.5	13,146.0	70,946.7	277,371.6
Petabytes by weight	1,052.1	1,770	10,127.1	7,397.5
Bandwidth, terabits/second	488.8	822.3	4,704.8	3,436.7

In other words: using readily-available consumer-grade media (not the higher capacities that might be available in the professional market), a 747 flying from JFK to LAX has a bandwidth of anywhere from just under 489 terabits per second to just over 4.7 petabits per second.

The cheapest route would be hard discs at this point—at \$194 and up for name-brand 6TB drives (in December 2016: probably lower when you read this), they’re a *lot* cheaper than very-high-capacity SSDs or SDHC cards, and even cheaper than BDXL blanks.

Sure, the latency is a killer, but there’s a good reason companies still ship massive quantities of data in physical form: it’s faster (and probably more secure). Unless you happen to have petabit-per-second internet connections handy, that is.

It’s been pointed out (thanks, Tom Dowling) that a 100-car freight train would have much more capacity and certainly even greater bandwidth (if it took, say, four *days* to get from New York to LA you’d still have twice the bandwidth)—but latency starts to get really ugly. Dowling also pointed to Amazon Web Service’s new [AWS Snowmobile](#), which uses 45’ shipping containers pulled by semis with up to 100PB per Snowmobile. Impressive...and, as the site points out, a much faster way to transfer massive quantities of data than over the internet.

The Weight and Cost of a Petabyte

As a sidebar, it might be interesting to look at the size, weight and cost of a petabyte of data, using Amazon prices and specs as of December 9, 2016. In this case, because BDXL blanks are expensive and don’t come in bulk packs, I’m dropping back to BD-R DL, double-layer Blu-ray discs, which store a mere 50GB each. In all cases, I’m using a known brand name—not always the cheapest, but avoiding the known problem of (for example) “terabyte” flash drives that are actually gigabyte drives with software tricks to make them show huge capacity.

Here are four options, from cheapest to most expensive:

- **Hard disk:** Toshiba X300. Need 167 drives. Total cost: \$32,395. Total weight: 167 pounds. Total volume: 2.24 cubic feet.

- **Blu-ray DL:** Verbatim 50-packs. Need 400 spindles. Total cost: \$45,188. Total weight: 760 pounds. Total volume: 17.74 cubic feet.
- **SSD:** Samsung 850 EVO. Need 250 drives. Total cost: \$323,750. Total weight: 29.25 pounds. Total volume: 0.42 cubic feet.
- **SDHC:** SanDisk Extreme Pro. Need 2,000 cards. Total cost: \$684,160. Total weight: 40 pounds. Total volume: 0.11 cubic feet.

That there is a roughly ten-to-one price differential between high-capacity solid-state storage and high-capacity hard disks should surprise nobody who's followed storage media. That you can buy a petabyte of storage—1,000 terabytes!—for less than \$33,000 at consumer pricing for a name brand is, well, astonishing.

SDHC wins on volume: nine petabytes in a one-cubic-foot box (a very heavy and expensive one-cubic-foot box, to be sure!). SSD wins on weight. Blu-ray wins in only one dimension: not vulnerable to extreme magnetic fields. On the other hand, the other media are all rewritable.

The Half-Life of Digital Formats

Speaking of digital formats...David Rosenthal [posted this](#) on November 24, 2010 at *DSHR's Blog*, and it's still an interesting discussion. The lede:

I've argued for some time that there are [no longer any plausible scenarios by which a format will ever go obsolete](#) if it has been in wide use since the advent of the Web in 1995. In that time no-one has shown me a convincing counter-example; a format in wide use since 1995 in which content is no longer practically accessible. I accept that many formats from before 1995 need software archeology, and that there are special cases such as games and other content protected by DRM which pose primarily legal rather than technical problems.

The discussion that follows makes a case for lack of recent-format obsolescence and suggests that it's not cost-effective to prepare for technical obsolescence in advance. The last paragraph:

What this analysis shows is that even in exceptionally pessimistic scenarios to justify spending \$1 now on preparing for format obsolescence we have to be sure that doing so is more effective than spending about double that when obsolescence happens. In scenarios that conform more closely to what we observe in the real world, we would have to be sure that spending \$1 now is more effective than spending about \$20 when it is needed.

Is he right? Damfino. The thoughtful comments make it clear that he's defining "wide use" and "obsolescent" somewhat narrowly—basically excluding any format that's not used *across the web*.

Videos in Chrome

The story dates from January 12, 2011, by Peter Bright at *ars technica*: “Google’s dropping H.264 from Chrome a step backward for openness.” The essence is in the lede:

The promise of HTML5’s <video> tag was a simple one: to allow web pages to contain embedded video without the need for plugins. With the decision to remove support for the widespread H.264 codec from future versions of Chrome, Google has undermined this widely-anticipated feature. The company is claiming that it wants to support “open codecs” instead, and so from now on will support only two formats: its own WebM codec, and Theora.

Google’s justification doesn’t really add up, and there’s a strong chance that the decision will serve only to undermine the use of the <video> tag completely. This is not a move promoting the open web. If anything, it is quite the reverse.

It’s a complicated story involving, among other things, the definition of “open.” H.264 is a proper technical standard, developed using proper techniques—but it involves royalties. Theora and WebM were not developed as proper (ANSI-recognized) technical standards—but both are royalty-free:

Both VP8 and Theora are, however, royalty-free. Both were designed to avoid existing video patents. Theora was designed to use no patented techniques at all. VP8 does include patented techniques, but these techniques were developed and patented by On2. Google, as present owner of those patents, is permitting their use, in any application, without payment of any royalty.

At least to a point: the threat with both of those codecs is that they may, in fact, infringe on one or more patents, in spite of efforts to the contrary. If this turns out to be the case, one or both of the codecs might end up in a very similar position to H.264, as far as royalties are concerned.

Here’s the thing: as Bright admits, W3C (developers of HTML5) *mandates* that implementations be royalty-free; thus, H.264 is fairly unambiguously not up to snuff. Bright’s response is to belittle royalty-free:

Whether royalties actually stand in the way of adoption and implementation, however, is far from obvious. Patent and royalty restrictions have also done little to prevent the development of high quality open source H.264 implementations, after all. In principle, distribution of binaries (but not source code) that implement the patented techniques of H.264 requires a license, but while many Linux distributions strive to avoid such binaries, the reality is that they are [freely distributed](#) without anyone paying a cent to MPEG-LA. As long as developers stick to distributing source code (which describes the

algorithms in question, but which does not actually *function*), they can operate unhindered by the patents and subsequent royalty demands.

There's more, but it all boils down to "I don't think royalty-free matters." And an explicit statement that Google can afford the royalty. So?

Where do things stand in 2016? According to *Wikipedia*, Microsoft Edge supports H.264, doesn't support Theora and supports one version of WebM. Firefox supports all three (although earlier in the article it says Mozilla does *not* support H.264), as does Opera. Safari *only* supports H.264.

Oh, and Chrome? The announcement to remove support for H.264 was on January 11, 2011. As of late December 2016, Chrome still supports H.264. Interesting.

Ridley Scott on Flicks

I would be a terrible disappointment to director Ridley Scott (if he knew who I was), based on "[The Only Way to See a Film](#)" (posted February 5, 2012 at *Huffington Post*) and Brent Rose's "[Ridley Scott: Streaming Movies Suck](#)," posted the same day at *Gizmodo*. The key paragraph from Scott's own piece:

In my view, the only way to see a film remains the way the filmmaker intended: inside a large movie theater with great sound and pristine picture. Music and dialogue that doesn't fully reproduce the soundtrack of the original loses an essential element for its appreciation. Simply put, the film loses its power.

I don't know how long it's been since I've seen a movie in a large movie theater (are there any of those left?); in the last couple of decades, the only times I've seen movies in theaters at all have been the small movie theaters on some cruise ships.

Or maybe he wouldn't be disappointed. After flatly saying the *only* way to see a flick is in a big theater, he backs off to his *real* problem:

Short of that, the technically sophisticated Blu-ray disc, of which I've been a supporter since its inception, is the closest we've come to replicating the best theatrical viewing experience I've ever seen. It allows us to present in a person's living room films in their original form with proper colors, aspect ratio, sound quality, and, perhaps most importantly, startling clarity.

Which is why it has never made sense to me that those preoccupied with how movies are delivered have for years written off "physical media" (i.e., movies on discs) as "dead" even though the evidence shows it isn't happening and won't for years to come. Technology will need to make many more huge leaps before one can ever view films with the level of picture and sound quality many film lovers demand

without having to slide a disc into a player, especially with the technical requirements of today's 3D movies.

Remember 3D movies? Remember when we were assured that our next TV would be 3D *whether we wanted it or not*? Ah, but that's a different rant.

The followup skips the "theater" red herring and gets right to what Scott's really decrying:

Three-time Oscar-nominated director of many awesomesauce movies [Ridley Scott penned a HuffPo article](#) yesterday, detailing why streaming movies are still vastly inferior to physical media such as Blu-ray. Oh, yeah, Mr. Scott? You're... you're... absolutely right. Sigh.

As much as we like our on-demand flick fix, Scott has a point. Namely, that we're so quick to be wooed by a new and convenient delivery method that we forget that it can't deliver kick-ass video and audio fidelity.

The reason is compression. Blu-rays average 30Mbps, with a peak of 42Mbps, while Netflix' "HD" speed in 2012 was around 3.8Mbps. (It still is, apparently—and many ISPs can't handle that much). At some point, compression makes a difference. And now there's 4K...

Here's the thing: while I'm absolutely certain Scott's right (and we watch our movies on Blu-ray), there's a *load* of compression on Blu-ray—and even more on UHD Blu-ray (BDXL). Do the calculations:

A standard HDTV picture (*not* UHD/4k) is 1920x1080 pixels or 2.07 megapixels per frame. A color pixel is at least three bytes (8 bits each for red, green and blue), so a single frame is 6.21 megabytes. Frame rate is typically 60fps. That means video requires a minimum of 372.6 megabytes per second (or nearly three gigabits per second)—but there's also at least one sound track and probably several, so add another 1.4 megabits or so. Let's round it up to three gigabits per second—and a typical disc storage rate of 30 megabits. So you need *at least* 100:1 compression. (If a dual-layer 50GB BD disc has a 2-hour movie with no extras—and in most cases there's likely to be a lot of extra content—the raw storage requirements would appear to be around 2.7 terabytes, so the disc represents at least 54:1 compression—more likely much higher.)

Modern encoding schemes seem to be able to do 100:1 compression with few visible artifacts (unless you're stepping through frame by frame, you're unlikely to notice any). But for 3.8Mbps streaming, you're dealing with around 790:1 compression. That's a lot tougher.

Here's a data point, albeit for 4K UHD rather than HDTV as such: As noted in an equipment review in the November 2016 *Sound & Vision*, the bandwidth required for the full 4K/Ultra High Def specification is 18.2 gigabits per second. That's 18.2 Gbps—just possibly a little more than your Wi-fi can handle, much less most broadband connections. Let's see: for a 2-hour movie with no extras, that's 16.38 terabytes. A UHD BD disc holds 128GB. In other words, the disc represents *at least* 128:1 compression.

Along these lines, it might be worth mentioning “[1080p video smackdown: iTunes vs. Blu-ray](#)” by Iljitsch van Beijum on March 14, 2012 at *ars technica*. After noting that iTunes’ HD versions of movies actually do look better than the standard-def versions, the author uses photographs of a video screen to try to compare a five-year-old movie available as a 3.62GB iTunes download or an up-to-50-GB Blu-ray. There are differences, some subtle and some not-so-subtle, although the test method (and capturing the photos in a lossy format!) certainly minimizes them.

What may be most striking about this feature is the stream of more than 200 comments, chock full of Apple triumphalists and “good enough” folks. (Although certainly not everybody...) I “learned” that Ordinary People can’t even distinguish standard def TV from HDTV at a normal viewing distance. I’d guess there were lots of folks who responded to those newfangled DVDs by assuring us that nobody could actually *see* the quality improvement over good ‘ol VHS. Not all, of course, but it’s interesting to see how many people were happy to proclaim that Apple had killed Blu-ray in 2012. I wonder how many of those folks still use the iPhone they had in 2012, because Good Enough?

Don’t get me wrong: I’m not saying good enough is *not* good enough in many cases; I just hate the “it’s good enough for me/for most people THEREFORE BETTER IS DEAD.” I’d guess that 20%-30% of the movies we watch on Saturday nights and 90% of the old TV shows we watch on some other nights are on DVD rather than Blu-ray, and they’re just fine. But the Blu-ray improvement *is* visible, and I appreciate the fact that it’s our choice to make. And while I don’t see us moving to 4K for years, maybe quite a few years, I’m not about to say “nobody needs 4K.”

If Android is a “stolen product,” then so was the iPhone

So says Timothy B. Lee in this long and interesting discussion of multitouch and smartphone interface development, [posted February 23, 2012](#) at *ars technica*—nicely illustrated with a stone engraved “The Bad Artists Imitate, The Great Artists Steal,” with Pablo Picasso crossed out and Banksy scrawled in.

According to his official biographer, Steve Jobs went ballistic in January 2010 when he saw HTC’s newest Android phones. “I want you to stop using our ideas in Android,” Jobs reportedly told Eric Schmidt, then Google’s CEO. Schmidt had already been [forced to resign from Apple’s board](#), partly due to increased smartphone competition between the two companies. Jobs then [vowed](#) to “spend every penny of Apple’s \$40 billion in the bank to right this wrong.”

Jobs called Android a “stolen product,” but theft can be a tricky concept when talking about innovation. The iPhone didn’t emerge fully formed from Jobs’s head. Rather, it represented the culmination of incremental innovation over decades—much of which occurred outside of Cupertino.

That's the start, and we find out early on that the first multitouch screen goes back to 1984 and Bell Labs. Quite a few noteworthy highlights since then are mentioned, including the first touchscreen smartphone, IBM's Simon, introduced in 1993.

The second half of the essay deals with the more direct question, and basically says the iPhone was good because it stole *many* good ideas—and after Android phones came out, later versions of the iPhone included elements apparently originated in Android. Also worth noting:

Patent law generally gives a firm like Apple one year from the public disclosure of an invention to file for a patent on it. Apple unveiled the iPhone in January 2007, so the filing deadline for iPhone-related inventions would have been in January 2008. After filing, there is an additional 18-month delay before applications are made public. So if Apple filed an iPhone-related patent application on the last day before the deadline, Google wouldn't have learned of its existence until July 2009—almost a year after the first Android phone [hit the market](#).

And even after patent applications are made public, it can take several more years for the patent office to make a decision on them. There's also no certainty about what a granted patent covers or whether it will stand up in court.

In short, Eric Schmidt's Android development team would have had no idea in 2008 which ideas were, legally speaking, Apple's ideas. The only foolproof way to avoid infringing Apple's patents would have been to avoid a multitouch phone OS at all.

Not that this is new...

This isn't the first time Apple built a new user interface based on the ideas of others, then sued competitors for using those same ideas. The graphical user interface now standard on desktop computers can be traced back to the [invention of the mouse](#) by SRI's Doug Engelbart in the 1960s. The ideas were refined at Xerox PARC in the 1970s, where Steve Jobs famously led a group of Apple engineers to visit in 1979. Five years later, Apple introduced the Macintosh. Those ideas then found a much larger audience.

Microsoft scrambled to catch up, releasing the first version of Windows in 1985. In 1988, Apple [filed a lawsuit](#) accusing Microsoft of stealing the "look and feel" of the Macintosh. Xerox [got involved in 1989](#) with a lawsuit accusing Apple of stealing the ideas behind the Macintosh from Xerox researchers. The courts eventually ruled key user interface concepts behind the Macintosh were [not copyrightable](#), removing the legal cloud that had hung over early GUIs.

I continue to believe that software patents, like business methods patents, are inherently bad for progress and competition, but what do I know?

Make That 19 Years Ago...

The piece is “Go Back In Time: How 10 Big Websites Looked 15 Years Ago,” [posted April 20, 2012](#) by Chris Hoffman at *MakeUseOf*—but since it’s now more than four years later...

It’s a cute piece, with screenshots from the Wayback Machine of some key websites—including Apple, Google (1998 rather than 1997: Google’s not that old), Yahoo! back when it was a directory, Microsoft and others. Most of the sites don’t look all that bad. Then there’s AltaVista...or, rather, AltaVista.com: “AltaVista Technology, Inc. of California: Creators of Premier Multimedia Email and Web Authoring Software.” Those two lines (the colon is here in lieu of a line break—but the period *is in the original*) are the banner.

Some interesting comments—and it appears that MakeUseOf doesn’t monitor comments for spam, or perhaps considers religious screeds as appropriate comments on old websites.

Why you can't trust tech press to teach you about the tech industry

I wish I’d noted [this April 30, 2012](#) Anil Dash story at Dash’s blog a year or more ago—before its lessons seemed to go way beyond the tech industry. The intro, before moving to a fairly specific example:

If there were one lesson I'd want to impress upon people who are interested in succeeding in the technology industry, it would be, as I've said before, [know your shit](#). Know the discipline you're in, know the history of those who've done your kind of work before, understand the lessons of their efforts, and in general look beyond the things that are making noise right now in order to understand bigger patterns of how technology works, both literally and socially.

This is a difficult challenge, because **today's media about the technology industry will not teach entrepreneurs and creators what they need to know** about the history of the technology industry.

I don't just mean this in the obvious way — nobody thinks you can earn a PhD in computer science by reading a tech blog. But I mean the broader landscape of sites that attract attention from technology developers and startup aficionados are woefully myopic in their understanding and perspective of the disciplines they cover. [Disclaimer: This post mentions lots of sites that write about tech; I write for Wired (ostensibly a competitor) and advise Vox Media (parent of The Verge, mentioned below), as explained on [my about page](#).]

I think I’m *not* going to discuss the connections with political coverage and such wonders as normalizing, false equivalences and The Story of The

Moment. It's too depressing. I will quote Dash's bullet list of some things wrong with the technology press; you can make the connections.

- In tech financial coverage, there is a focus on valuation, deals and funding instead of markets, costs, profits, losses, revenues and sustainability.
- In tech executive coverage, there is a focus on personalities and drama instead of capabilities and execution.
- In tech product coverage, there is a focus on features and announcements instead of evaluating whether a product is meaningful and worthwhile.
- Technology trade press doesn't treat our industry as a business, so much as a "scene"; If our industry had magazines, we'd have a lot of *People* but no *Variety*, a *Rolling Stone*, but no *Billboard*.

There are many more examples of the flaws, but these are obvious ones. What we may *not* know, though is that there's another flaw:

- For all but the biggest tech stories, any individual article likely lacks enough information to make a decision about the topic of that article.

Yup. And it ain't just technology. (I hear *Teen Vogue* is now the place to go for serious political journalism.)

Target, Unhappy With Being an Amazon Showroom, Will Stop Selling Kindles

Another piece of old news possibly still worth thinking about four years later—this one a post on Google+ [on May 3, 2012](#) by Tim O'Reilly.

The problem noted by O'Reilly is that Amazon *explicitly* encouraged “showrooming”—where you go to a store to look at merchandise, then buy it online—with an Amazon Price Check promotion that gave people an extra 5% discount if they scanned items at stores. That's pretty blatant. And, of course, if everybody showroomed, there wouldn't be any more showrooms. Fortunately, that hasn't happened.

If you think about it the right way, it's a kind of "theft of service." The retailer with the showroom is in a tacit exchange with the customer: We will provide you with this amenity - the chance for you to lay your hands on the goods and take a look at them - in exchange for the chance to sell them to you.

As I wrote in my 2003 piece, "Buy where you shop" (http://tim.oreilly.com/articles/buy_where_shop.html), if consumers break this bargain, they ultimately won't have the showroom to go to. That's short sighted. But when one retailer, like Amazon, urges

customers to use a service funded by a competitor but not to pay for it, that's sleazy, especially when that other retailer is a partner.

I always think of something Walt Mossberg once told me he'd said to Microsoft: "If you guys would dial back the greed just 5%, everyone wouldn't hate you so much."

Lots'o'comments. One cites an article suggesting that Apple was strongarming Target into dropping Kindles. One asserts that Amazon did *not* encourage showrooming—apparently that 5% discount isn't regarded by this person as an enticement. As some point out, the real risk is to *local* merchants, and here Target is part of the problem.

Full disclosure: we own a Kindle Fire HD 8.9 and a Paperwhite. But we also make our three-digit Target offering each month (and since we use a Redcard, shipping for online items is just as free as it is with Amazon Prime, although Target's search facility is a mess.) As of December 2016, Target *does* sell Kindles. And iPads.

Offline: How's it going?

Paul Miller did something in 2012 that would have been entirely uninteresting in 2001—and might have him called peculiar in 2016. He took a year off the internet. This [Verge piece on August 13, 2012](#) is a report along the way.

It's all anybody asks me. I tell them I'm not using the internet for a year, and they just need to know: "How's it going?"

"It's going great," I say.

"Yeah?" they say, dubiously. Their eyes glaze over: they're trying to imagine what it would be like for them to leave the internet for any span of time. They probably read some article recently that made them feel bad about their Facebook habit. "I don't think I could do it," they admit.

"Well, it's not actually a realistic thing to do," I assure them. "I'm just really lucky and blessed that my work is supporting me... the weird thing is that writing about technology turns out to be the one profession where I can actually do this and get paid for it."

Oddly enough, he was being paid by Vox Media, an online "magazine empire" paying a writer a full-time salary to write about being offline.

The first two weeks were a zen-like blur. I've never felt so calm and happy in my life. Never. And then I started actually getting stuff done. I bought copies of Homer, Plato, Aristotle, Herodotus, and Aeschylus. I was writing at an amazing pace. For the first time ever I seemed to be outpacing my editors.

Without the internet, everything seemed new to me. Every untweeted observation of daily life was more sacred. Every conversation was face to

face or a phone call, and filled with a hundred fresh nuances. The air smelled better. My sentences seemed less convoluted. I lost a bit of weight.

That zen-like blur has faded (at this point, he was three months in), but he was sticking with it. And realizing things:

People ask me if I recommend taking a break from the internet. I do, but I don't think there's a rubber stamp-able routine. A lot of the people I know would be risking their livelihoods to take an entire evening off from email. And ultimately, it matters more *why* you take time off than *how* you do it. It's not about taking an hour long break from Twitter; it's about what you want to do during that hour that *requires* you to avoid Twitter. The novelty of cutting the cord only has so much mileage on its own.

For me, my time is no longer defined by the fact that it's spent without the internet. It's simply my time, and I have to fill it. The luxury that no internet has afforded me is that I feel like I have more time to fill, and fewer ways to fill it. It's the boredom and lack of stimulation that drives me to do things I really care about, like writing and spending time with others.

At the bottom of the article is a link to all 37 articles, ending with one on [May 3, 2013](#), two days after he went back online. You might or might not want to read that and some of the other stories and comments. I found the final story a bit disheartening. (He really needs to take a year or lifetime away from smoking, but that's a different addiction.)

I'm old, of course, but also earned my living from technology and wrote my first book on a personal computer in 1982. At the same time, I take *every* evening and night offline, either from dinner on or from 8:30 PM until 7:30 AM or so—and I don't carry a smartphone, so when my wife and I are walking (30 minutes a day, 6 or 7 days a week) or I'm ambling on Wednesday mornings, I'm entirely offline. Could I take a week entirely offline? Well, on all but the last cruise we were on, we were entirely offline for seven to 21 days; the last cruise was only different because of my part-time job at the time.

But that's me. I *do* suggest taking breaks from the internet, but that might just mean going out to enjoy the natural world for an hour or two or, y'know, leaving your online tethers powered down when you're at a restaurant or watching a movie or play. (When we go to the Bankhead Theater, the show always begins with the obligatory "no photos and please shut off your devices"; it's interesting to see just how fast a minority of the audience turns their tablets/phones back on at intermission!) Taking a year off? Maybe a bit extreme.

How Google Builds Its Maps—and What It Means for the Future of Everything

As it stands, this [September 6, 2012 piece](#) by Alexis C. Madrigal at *The Atlantic* is an interesting discussion of Ground Truth, the “secretive program” at Google to make its maps most accurate and most useful.

Not much to say about it other than to quote a sentence that brought an involuntary “you’re not from around these parts, are you?” response from my native *Northern California* brain:

The office where Google has been building the best representation of the world is not a remarkable place. It has all the free food, ping pong, and [Google Maps-inspired Christoph Niemann cartoons](#) that you'd expect, but it's still a low-slung office building just off the 101 in Mountain View in the burbs.

Set aside that “in the burbs” nonsense; Mountain View has around 79,000 people, a well-defined downtown, and more than \$100k median household income: it's a small city by California standards, but larger than 17 state capitals. Nope: it's what comes just before that: “the 101.” There is no “the 101” in Mountain View; there is 101 or Highway 101. The “the” is a tipoff that the writer hails from Southern California (or elsewhere): it's how you recognize radio & TV people who recently migrated to the Bay Area.

Yeah, I know, that's petty. It's an interesting article.

Curator finds the world's first ever color movie hidden inside museum vault

The category flag on [this September 12, 2012 piece](#) by George Dvosrky at *io9* is “This is Awesome”—and I agree. I don't remember this story getting much play in 2012, and even if you were aware of it you may have forgotten. In which case, go to that link and watch the 4:56 video, which includes the color movies from 1902-1904.

That's right: color movies—movies *shot* in color, not colorized or hand-tinted. “But there wasn't any color motion picture film in 1902,” you may say. Ah, but Turner had a technique for shooting frames through different filters, so that each sequence of three b&w frames makes a color whole. Clever restoration work brings us the images.

Comments include an example of Sergey Prokudin-Gorsky's *still* color photographs of roughly the same period (using similar techniques). The Library of Congress hosts [a digitized collection](#) of Prokudin-Gorsky's photos, which are themselves pretty remarkable. (Or you can just browse image results in Bing or Google or DuckDuckGo or StartPage.)

The Assumptions You Make About Your Slow PC (and Why They're Probably Wrong)

What's remarkable about this [November 11, 2012 piece](#) by Whitson Gordon at *lifehacker* is that it's not entirely obsolete four years later. It includes discussions of five "Assumptions," and before biting into one of them I'll list the lot:

- Assumption #1: You Need to Load Up On Expensive Antivirus to Keep Your Computer Fast
- Assumption #2: You Need a Bunch of Extra RAM and Hard Drive Space
- Assumption #3: Your Hardware Is Just "Wearing Out" Over Time
- Assumption #4: You Need to Regularly Reinstall Your OS
- Assumption #5: You Need to Defrag/Clean the Registry/Tweak Prefetching/etc.

There are mild exceptions in each discussion, but I tend to agree with four of the five—and maybe all five, depending on your definition of "expensive." But I disagree with Gordon's assertion that Windows Security Essentials (or the more powerful Windows Defender in Windows 10) is all the security you need if you perform safe browsing. Oh, and the assertion that you should never run two antimalware programs at once. That's *usually* true—but Malwarebytes Anti-Malware is specifically designed to run alongside Windows Defender, and I've had it save my butt more than once while carrying out research: sometimes Windows Defender isn't quite good enough.

On the other hand, if you use Comcast broadband, you're already paying for the Norton Security Suite (this may also be true for some other broadband vendors), and the newer versions of Norton don't slow down your computer the way older ones seemed to. My wife uses Norton, and we were delighted to stop renewing our paid subscription and switch to the Comcast license (I believe it covers up to five devices per account).

New Technology Is Making Us More Like the Amish

Such a charming title, and the essay—by Jamey Wetmore [on December 24, 2012](#) at *Slate*—is worth thinking about.

I know. You own a slim titanium ultrabook computer, an eye popping LCD 3D HD television, an iPhone with a custom-designed carbon fiber cover, and a sports car with 360 horsepower under the hood. You don't have anything in common with the Amish.

It's possible. But there are a lot of us who are beginning to adopt some practices that are pretty close to the Amish. No, I'm not talking about the Amish belief in adult baptism or the importance of farming in daily life. I'm talking about the decisions the Amish make about technology. More and more of us have begun to think about the impact that technology has on our relationships with others and we've begun to alter our practices.

Well, no, I own a boring middle-of-the-road Toshiba notebook, a wonderful non-3D plasma TV (less eye-popping, more accurate), no iStuff at all and an 11-year-old Civic with, I think, 160HP (or less?). But the point's well taken. Also well taken: the Amish are *not* wholly anti-technology, as Wetmore explains—but they look at technology mindfully and in terms of its impact on family and community.

The payoff:

Increasingly, there are complaints by people that technologies like e-mail, Facebook, and cellphones are disturbing the relationships they hold most dear. To combat this, many of us have developed rules. It's hard to find a family that hasn't specifically developed a rule that prohibits cellphones, texting, and e-mail from the dinner table. Many families believe that dinner is an important time and space to share just with the people who are present. We therefore limit the use of certain technologies to maximize our face-to-face interactions.

Every time you create a rule—or even grudgingly abide by your loved one's request—to turn off or disconnect from your phone/e-mail/Twitter/Facebook/etc. when you are spending time with family or loved ones, you are embracing an Amish value. That's not to say that you dislike those technologies, but rather that you've decided to carve out a part of your life where you don't use them. The more we seek to maximize our values by carefully delineating how, why, and when we use technology we're becoming a bit more Amish.

Which may be a very good thing.

The Back

The Money of Music

Time for my annual silliness on how much or how little you can spend to put together a stereo system that lives up to *Stereophile's* standards—that is, a system in which all components are listed in the most recent *Recommended Components* list, in this case in the October 2016 issue.

Systems come in four levels and four categories. The levels are: Class A and A+, lowest price; same, highest price; Class B and below, lowest price; same, highest price. The categories are: CD player and speakers; turntable and CD player and speakers; digital server and speakers; portable

digital player and headphones. (In all categories but the last, amplifiers and sometimes preamps are also needed: portable digital players include amps.) Cables aren't in classes; I assume at least three feet or one meter for interconnects and at least six feet or two meters for speaker cables. (What? You think cables are a trivial part of a system's price? How does \$40,000 for two sets of interconnects in a CD+turntable system and \$32,000 for speaker cables sound?) Most write-ups build on the first—that is, using the power amplifiers, speakers and cables from the CD-only systems and adding or substituting other sources. If you aren't familiar with *Stereophile's* grading, Class A and A+ are the best available without regard to price; other categories are still worthy and musically satisfying, but not quite as elevated in level.

“Wpc” is watts per channel, typically into 8 ohms; “monoblocks” are single-channel amplifiers, priced as a pair.

For the record: I've upgraded my personal system (we also have a nice little Denon compact system we use for dinner music) to Grado HR80i headphones, still driven by an aging 8GB Sansa Fuze player—and if I upgraded right now, it would probably be to a Ponoplayer, even though I'm not a huge Neil Young fan.

CD-only System

Basically, a CD player (or universal CD/DVD/SACD player), an amplifier and preamp or an integrated amplifier, a pair of speakers, one set of interconnects and speaker cables.

Class A: Low price

CD: Oppo BDP-103 universal disc player, \$399. Amplification: either the Ayre Acoustics K-5XE preamp, \$4,350, and Benchmark AHB2 solid state 100Wpc amplifier, \$2,995—or, if you love tube sounds, PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium 42Wpc amp, \$3,199; or the \$2,495 Parasound Halo 160Wpc integrated amp at \$2,495. So figure \$2,495 to \$7,549 for amplification. Speakers: KEF LS50 Anniversary Model, \$1,499—but these small speakers need a subwoofer, so add \$3,995 for the MartinLogan BalancedForce 212, for a total of \$5,494. (Yes, the subwoofer costs more than twice as much as the speakers. Welcome to the wonderful world of price-no-object audiophilia, even at the low end.) Interconnects: AudioQuest Tower, \$25. Speaker cables: Kimber 4PR, \$137/10ft. Adding it all up, we get \$8,550 with integrated amp, \$13,425 with solid-state separates or \$13,625 with tube amp. (I have no doubt that the \$8,550 system would sound *great*.) Note the extra \$25—for a second set of interconnects between the preamp and amplifier.

Class A: High price

CD: DCS Vivaldi, \$114,996. No, the extra ones aren't typos. Amplification: either the Boulder 2110 preamp (\$55,000) and Dartzeel NHB-458 450Wpc monoblocks (\$168,932) solid-state or Lamm ML-3 32Wpc tubed monoblocks (\$139,490); or the Bel Canto Design Black Amplification System 300Wpc "integrated" amplifier (\$50,000), which is three boxes. Figure \$50,000 to \$223,932 for amplification. Speakers: Wilson Audio Specialties Alexandria XLF, \$210,000. Interconnects: Fono Acoustica Virtuoso, \$20,384. Speaker cable: TARA Labs Omega Evolution SP, \$32,000. Total, noting that separate amps require an extra set of interconnects: \$472,380 with integrated amp, \$592,254 with solid-state amp or \$621,696 with tube amps. (As elsewhere, the tube amps might or might not have enough power to drive the speakers.) Ratio between high and low: 55:1 for integrated amp, 44:1 solid state separates, 46:1 tubes.

Class B and below: Low price

CD: NAD C 516BEE, \$299. Amplification: either the Schiit Audio \$49 preamp and Lindell AmpX 20Wpc \$1,595 amp (the tube/solid-state split is only for Class A/A+), or the \$99.90 Lepai LP749BE 100Wpc integrated; thus, either \$99.90 or \$1,644. Speakers: Dayton Audio B652-AIR, \$60/pair. Add \$249 for PSB Subseries 100 subwoofer. Same cables, so the total is \$869.90 or \$2,440 (rounded) with separates. That you can put together an all-recommended-components system for \$870 is fairly remarkable.

Class B and below: High price

CD: Metronome CD8 S, \$9,200. (Yes, that's 23 times the price of a Class A player that also—unlike this one—plays SACDs.) Amplification: Either Parasound Halo P7 preamp, \$2,295, and Raven Audio Spirit Mk. 2 26Wpc monoblocks, \$13,990, for a total of \$16,285, or Rogers High Fidelity EHF-100 Mk.2 35Wpc integrated, \$8,000. Speakers: Nola Metro Grand Reference Gold, \$33,000. Same cables, so the total is \$102,554 or \$131,193—but the cables alone make up more than half that price, so a more rational choice would involve "cheap" cables—say \$1,000 for interconnects and \$2,000 for speakers—bringing the totals down to a mere \$53,200 or \$62,485. Ratio between high and low: 61:1 integrated, 26:1 with separates.

Base Prices for Turntable, Server Systems

Let's assume solid-state separates for high-priced systems, integrated for lower-priced. So: Class A, \$8,550 low, \$592,254 high; Class B and lower, \$870 low, \$62,485 high.

Adding Vinyl

Sure, you *could* have a vinyl-only system—but with a Class A CD player costing \$399, it's hardly worth mentioning the price differences. Adding vinyl means a turntable, tonearm, cartridge and phono preamp—but some or all of those may be combined into a single unit.

Class A, Low Price

Turntable: Pear Audio Blue-Kid Thomas with Cornet 2 tonearm, \$5,995. Cartridge: EMT TSD 15, \$1,590. Phono preamp: Lehmann Decade, \$2,099. Add \$25 for interconnect. Subtotal \$9,709; system total \$18,259. Adding LP playback slightly more than doubles the total system price.

Class A, High Price

Turntable: Techdas Air Force One, \$105,000 without tonearm. Tonearm: SAT Pickup Arm, \$32,000. Cartridge: Air Tight PC-1 Magnum Opus, \$15,000. Phono preamp: Ypsilon VPS-100, \$26,000. Add \$20,384 for interconnect. Subtotal \$198,384; system total \$790,638: LP playback “only” adds about one-third to the system price. Ratio: 43:1.

Class B or Lower, Low Price

Turntable: Rega RP1, including tonearm and Ortofon cartridge, \$445. Phono preamp: Bozak Madisson CLK-PH2, \$19.95. Add \$25 for interconnect. Subtotal \$489.95; system total \$1,359.95.

Class B or Lower, High Price

Turntable: PBN Audio Groovemaster Vintage Direct PBN-DP6, including tonearm, \$8,500. Cartridge: Triangle Art Apollo MC, \$8,000. Phono preamp: Modwright PH 150, \$7,900. Add \$1,000 for interconnect. Subtotal \$25,400; system total \$87,885. Ratio 65:1.

Music Server and CD Player

Class A, Low Price

Server: Sony HAP-Z1ES Media Player, 1TB, \$1,999.99. Add \$25 for interconnect. Subtotal \$2,024.99; total \$10,574.99.

Class A, High Price

Server: Meridian Sooloos System, \$13,000 with 2TB storage. Add \$20,384 for interconnect. Subtotal \$33,384; total \$625,638. Ratio 59:1.

Class B and Below, Low and High Price

Server: SOTM SMS-1000SQ Windows Edition with Audiophile Optimizer, \$4,000 (storage not stated)—there's only one server below Class A. Low total \$4,895; high total \$86,869. Ratio 18:1.

Portable System

I'm assuming a portable player and a set of headphones. Yes, you need something to get music onto the player—but any computer will do. All portable players are in Class A.

Class A, Low Price

Player: Ponoplayer, 64GB (expandable), \$399. Headphones: Thinksound On1, \$199.99. System price: \$598.99.

Class A, High Price

Player: Astell&Kern AK240 Portable Player, 256GB (expandable), \$2,500. Headphones: Audeze LCD-X, \$1,679. System price: \$4,179. Ratio: 7:1.

Class B and Below, Low Price

Same player. Headphones: Grado SR60i, \$79. System price: \$478.

Class B and Below, High Price

Same player. Headphones: Audeze EL-8, \$699. System price \$3,199. Ratio: 7:1

Conclusions

None. I find this annual exercise amusing. I would never argue that spending more on speakers might not buy better sound, and choose not to engage on other cost-related issues.

What would I buy if cost was no object, my wife and I agreed on placement and aesthetics, and I had no better use for my money? That last qualification is impossible, of course, but it might look something like this: Oppo BDP-103 disc player, \$399. Parasound Halo Integrated amplifier, \$2,495. GoldenEar Technology Triton One loudspeakers, \$4,999.98 (they're *borderline* Class A and decidedly full range: if they were in Class A, they'd be the low-price choice. I find it interesting that \$5,000 is "borderline Class A" while the cheapest full-range Class A loudspeakers are \$16,000, but never mind). With interconnects, that's \$8,055.98. If I wanted vinyl (I don't: been there, done that, no longer want to take the time for proper protection/cleaning, and I won't get started on euphonic distortion), I'd probably get the Sony PS-HX500 USB at \$599.99, which includes tonearm, cartridge, preamp and digital output. That brings it up to \$8,655.97.

I'd give the remaining \$780,000 (of the \$790,638 some anonymous donor had handed me and insisted that I spend) to some combination of Nature Conservancy, Planned Parenthood, ACLU, World Wildlife Fund, Americans United, EDF, Doctors Without Borders, LearningAlly, and appropriate local operations such as Alameda County Community Food Bank, Open Heart Kitchen, Valley Humane Society (a no-kill shelter), and Livermore Homeless Refuge. Well, after setting aside \$10,000 to \$20,000 for music downloads and CDs: after all, any *music* system should have more money in music—downloads, LPs, CDs—than it does in hardware.

More Back

That's the end of that extended exercise. Maybe again in another year. Maybe not. Meanwhile... As usual, way too much sniping about audio and video mixed about 50:50 with other snarky observation.

At Least it's Only 8%

The item's three years old, but bizarre enough to be worth noting: "[8% of Librarians Believe Printed Word Will Be 'Obsolete' by 2050](#)." The source is CNSNews.com, an offspring of the Media Research Center, an outfit that believes it has "clearly demonstrate[d] a liberal bias in many news outlets." MRC's home page leads with "the war on coal," so I believe you should treat this item as seriously as you would a story in *National Enquirer*.

That said, it's an odd and interesting piece, based on a survey by an architectural firm with some libraries to its name. Here's the lede:

Eight percent of librarians and media center specialists believe that people will be largely illiterate by 2050 as video and audio forms of communication completely replace the printed word, according to a 2012 survey.

Of course some respondents "have even predicted the total demise of literacy by 2050"—heck, a library science professor ran a whole online series about that.

The claim is based on a leading question:

"Do you agree that reading and writing will one day be obsolete – replaced by entirely oral/verbal or visual modes of communication?"

I don't see that "one day" means "by 2050." I'd point you to the survey itself and evaluate the sample size, techniques used, etc., but all I get is a 404.

It's *Totally* Worth It: Price and Performance

Michael Fremer touts the Niagara 7000 power conditioner in the February 2016 *Stereophile*, leading with an odd pair of comments on whether readers are "old enough" to remember using lamp cord to connect

speakers and “plugging the plugs of lamp-cord-like AC leads into any old wall sockets, themselves connected to any old household circuits?”

He remembers those days and that the first high-quality stereo system he heard under those conditions “sounded *amazing*.” Ah, but you see, back in the Good Old Days “today’s electrical problems didn’t exist” because there wasn’t “bad stuff of the digital kind” plugged into the wall. (The reason AC leads are lamp-cord-like is that lamp cords are AC leads...unless you plug your lamps into, I dunno, amplifiers.)

The Niagara is an 81lb. box that plugs into the wall and you plug your equipment into. It, of course, makes *amazing* differences that all but the deafest stereophiles will hear immediately. It costs \$7,995. (Hey, at least it’s not \$8,000, right?) The article doesn’t say how much power the Niagara itself consumes (I’m guessing it’s not 100% efficient), but high-end audio doesn’t usually concern itself with issues like that.

In Fremer’s case, it could be a savings: he normally uses *two* power conditioners (one for amps, one for everything else), costing \$5,995 and \$6,995 for a total of \$12,990. Does either trifling amount improve sound enough to be worth that kind of money? That depends on your resources and hearing, I guess.

In the March 2016 *Stereophile*, Art Dudley wrote a highly favorable review of the Metronome CD8S CD player and D/A processor. Dudley’s a vinyl guy but does deign to listen to CDs at time, and he really likes this unit. It’s also a D/A processor so you can use it to stream from other digital sources. John Atkinson was less thrilled when he tested the unit, calling its measured performance “idiosyncratic” and concluding that it’s “sub-optimally engineered.” Well, OK, so it’s not up to the Oppo BDP-103 (\$399), for example. But here’s the punchline (which you may already know if you’ve read this roundup carefully): this flawed player, which doesn’t play the variety of discs that the Oppo does (e.g. SACDs), costs \$9,200 (down from \$10,000 at the time of the review). [I would say that “idiosyncratic” inherently appeals to Art Dudley, but that would be mean.]

You have to learn John Atkinson’s measurement-sidebar writing style; he’s not going to say “this is a badly-engineered piece of crap” after the reviewer’s heaped praise on something—and usually “piece of crap” is too strong for the pricey stuff reviewed in *Stereophile*. The March 2016 issue does have another instance: Ken Micallef’s review of the Spec RPA-W7EX Real-Sound power amplifier (100Wpc, but into 4 ohms, not 8: it clips at 80Wpc into 4 ohms and 43Wpc into 8 ohm, so it’s a 40-watt amp by most standards). The review for this \$5,995 unit is quite favorable. Then we get to the measurement sidebar—and the very first graph, frequency response, suggests that something’s amiss. Add to that Atkinson’s footnote that the amp (which uses Class D amplification, prone to some ultrasonic emission) radiated *so much* radio frequency interference that the transistor radio Atkinson keeps tuned to NPR was overwhelmed: “When I turned on the W7EX, it wiped out FM reception with noise that was modulated by

the audio signal being amplified... This has not happened with class-D amplifiers since I tested some inexpensive models, many years ago.” He concludes “this is not an amplifier that can be universally recommended, I feel.” Atkinson is incredibly good at understatement. But, again, hey, it’s only \$5,995, a bit more than twice the price of Parasound’s amplifier that earns a class A recommendation and offers four times the power.

Sometimes the relative nature of pricing is obvious without even looking at an article—as in the May 2016 *Stereophile* cover, showing a huge speaker and this headline in very large type: “Wilson Sound & Styling for Less Than 20 Large.” (All caps.) In other words, this is some kind of huge bargain: a pair of loudspeakers costing less than \$20,000. Apparently that is a bargain for Wilson Audio Specialties: the Sabrina, at a mere \$15,900 a pair, is the “cheapest” Wilson loudspeaker (the company’s bookshelf speakers are \$22,500 a pair, and the good stuff is \$210,000).

Get Offa My Lawn!

Susan O’Doherty wrote “[6 Things It’s Probably Smart Not to Say to a Gray-Haired Person](#)” on December 8, 2013 at *Inside Higher Ed*. Full disclosure: I’m gray-haired, and have been since I was about 30 years old. Which makes the introductory paragraph all the more interesting:

A number of these advice lists have been going around social media. Some are snarky, but I have learned a lot from lists of well-intended questions and statements that are troublesome to people who use wheelchairs, helper animals, and so on. I made several of the comments below when I was younger, and I apologize to everyone I might have offended. It is sometimes hard to know what to say when you haven’t been in the other person’s position. With that in mind, younger people might want to avoid saying the following:

I’ll admit I hadn’t equated gray hair with helper animals and wheelchairs, possibly because my brother was gray by age 25, but...

Here are the six things: “Is that your grandson?” “It must take a lot of guts not to color your hair.” “Ditto for wearing it long.” “You don’t look [age]!” “Do you mind if I [push ahead of you on the coffee line, grab the swim lane you were waiting for, squeeze you out of a place on the elevator]? I have to get to work.” “It’s great that you stay so active!”

Gotta admit, if I ever encountered the fifth of those I’d be tempted to whack the ass that with my cane...if I had a cane. As becomes obvious, the author is a gray-haired person and probably speaking from personal experience. The discussions for the six comments are interesting. She closes:

Again, this is not meant as a lecture. I’m not offended when people say these things, and I definitely make much worse faux-pas on a regular basis (that is another post, though). But hearing them repeatedly gets wearing, and if you have gray-haired friends and acquaintances, I

thought you might appreciate knowing that. Naturally, everyone's reaction will be different. Feel free to share your own thoughts and advice in the comments.

And by the way, "You look great!" Is always welcome. So is, "Would like you like a seat?"

A handful of comments. I found this one interesting: "The worst is when the grocery store checkers address me as 'Young Lady,' oddly drawing attention to my age." Well...one of the vendors at the farmers' market we frequent *always* calls my 64-year-old wife "young lady," and she chooses not to be bothered by it. Different strokes

Speaking of "get offa my lawn," that's what I scrawled at the bottom of Ken C. Pohlmann's "Signals" column in the July/August 2016 *Sound & Vision*, "The Rise and Fall of Stereo (Part Two)." He's bemoaning soundbars and other devices with suboptimal stereo separation, and he comes very close to "kids these days" lamentations. (Pohlmann seems to think that the left and right tweeters in a TV soundbar are "a foot apart." I just measured our relatively cheap, relatively small soundbar, and the centers of the two tweeters are 34" apart. When you get basic facts wrong that badly...) He also denounces headphones as providing "terrible stereo playback" and generally hates almost everything around these days.

Today's Best TV?

This time I'm not being snarky. By all accounts, OLED is what TV *should* be (power-efficient, wide viewing angle, perfect blacks), but it's taking a while. The current state of the art appears to be the LG 65EF9500, a 65" UHD TV going for \$6,000 in April 2016, when it was reviewed in *Sound & Vision*. That's a significant reduction from earlier prices for big-screen OLED sets, but still a fair chunk of money. Still, the set appears to offer the best picture you can buy. (You can't measure the contrast ratio of any good OLED TV: the black is *complete* black, zero nits or foot-Lamberts.)

Even Smaller Mini-Rants

If you haven't seen a good old fashioned academic smackdown in a while you might want to read "Critic Without a Cause," Leon Wieseltier's review in the March 2016 *Atlantic* of A.O. Scott's *Better Living Through Criticism*. If you don't have the print magazine handy, you can read the essay [online](#)—and there are two dozen comments, which you may or may not find worthwhile.

The trouble with April Fool's jokes is that most aren't all that funny to begin with—and when the same gag is repeated, with variations, year after year it gets a bit wearisome. As, for example, *Sound & Vision's* annual April product review of the latest and greatest from Lirpa Labs (nudge nudge, Lirpa, wink wink, clever, huh?). For 2016, it was "Mob Cam VR,"

an app that “empowers smartphone owners to work as on-location cameramen for one or more distant viewers willing to pay [\$5 to \$20 per hour] for a live video feed.” The “review” is...well...humor-challenged. But, doubling down, the issue’s Ken Pohlmann column is an “Insider Tour of Lirpa Labs.” Sigh...

Are you living in the moment when you’re staring at your phone? Nathan Jurgenson [criticized](#) Ian MacKaye for [saying](#) that people taking pictures all the time aren’t living in the moment—and for presuming to be the arbiter of what’s documentation and what’s just noise. The “phones” in the headline may be misleading: *my* problem with the Borgification of daily life (that is, people who seem to be there but are really part of some faceless amalgamation) has to do with digital immersion at the expense of the physical world, not simply “documenting” that world. I believe that’s at least unfortunate and at most a danger, especially since the Borg increasingly feeds back bad information. As to the specific Jurgenson complaint, though: after reading the second link, I tend to agree that it’s a bit presumptuous for a rock musician (or a librarian or a Nobel prize winner) to say (paraphrasing) “your picture-taking is just noise, while my—and my grandmother’s—obsessive retention and organization is Documentation.”

The line between advertising (and “advertorials”) is frequently tricky, especially online—and I ran into a four-page situation in the May 2016 *Sound & Vision* where I *still* can’t tell whether there’s an unlabeled advertorial or just some really sloppy editing. Pages 38 and 39 are headlined (three headlines, largest type to smallest) “FAQ: Hi-Res Audio: Understanding Hi-Res Audio and Why You Want It.” (The second headline is *entirely* redundant, given the third, but never mind.) The two pages read like an advertorial, but there’s neither a label nor one specific advertiser. Then come pages 40-41, clearly an article, “Finding Hi-Res Music,” and it feels an awful lot like a strong-arm sales pitch. The lede:

Heard of hi-res audio? While most folks argue the merits of Spotify vs. Apple Music vs. Pandora, *enlightened* music lovers busily seek out other online sources for their music fix... [Emphasis added.]

Got that? If you’re not buying high-resolution music, you’re not enlightened. Wowser.

Little Audio-Related Items

Michael Fremer reviews the PS Audio BHK Signature 300 monoblock amplifier (tube/solid state hybrid) in the February 2016 *Stereophile*. It’s a fairly powerful amplifier, rated at 300 Wpc into 8 ohms (and exceeding that rating). By Fremer’s standards, it’s a budget amp at a mere \$14,998 for a stereo pair. (You’ll need good shelves: each one weighs 83lbs.)

I noted two things in sidebars to the positive review. First, these have the fragility that seems to be too typical of very expensive audio equipment: one of the amps crapped out when John Atkinson was testing it. The other is right there in the specs: “Power consumption: 75W at ready, 175W at idle, 850W at rated power into 8 ohms, 1600W at rated power into 4 ohms.” That’s a *lot* of power at idle and a ridiculous amount at ready (whatever the difference is), especially if you’re supposed to leave them in ready all the time. (I don’t see an on/off switch in the photo, so that’s my guess.) It also says the amp is about 35% efficient, which for a tubed unit probably isn’t bad.

The April 2016 *Stereophile’s* “Audio Streams” column has an acronym expansion that represents a language changing when I wasn’t watching, I suppose. “You can also opt to configure these drives as a RAID 0 or RAID 1 array (RAID=redundant array of independent disks)...” Huh. Wikipedia says “(originally **redundant array of inexpensive disks**, now commonly **array of independent disks**).” Footnotes for that expansion seem to date back to 1993. I suppose my problem is that “independent” seems to have no meaning in this instance—if the disks were truly independent, they wouldn’t be configured as an array. I guess disk manufacturers wanted to avoid the “cheap crap” stigma?

The Pressies?

OK, it’s almost three years old (I don’t run *THE BACK* very often) but it’s still amusing: Michael Eisen’s December 15, 2013 post at *it is NOT junk*, “Accepting nominations for the ‘Pressies’ recognizing the most overhyped science press releases of 2013.”

Scientists get all sorts of prizes this time of year. Some win a Lasker. Others a Nobel or a Breakthrough Prize. The really lucky get a commemorative mug from PNAS.

But the most important members of the scientific community get no recognition. I’m not talking about the graduate students and postdocs who actually do the work. No. I’m talking about the creative geniuses at university press offices who toil every week to turn the soon-to-be-published papers of their researchers – no matter how pedestrian or replicative – into heartbreaking works of staggering science.

He suggests four categories and invites nominations. The piece ends:

We haven’t decided what the winners will get, but our press office assures us that this year’s recipients will get the most important prize in the history of prizes – the first time anyone has ever received a prize like this. Henceforth the field of prizes will never be the same.

The comments...well, they’re probably more interesting if you’re a scientist, although some certainly make sense to us layfolk. As to the

Pressies as anything more than an amusing blog post: an exhaustive web search yields nothing much.

The Thought Leader

That's the title of an [op-ed by David Brooks](#) in the December 16, 2013 *New York Times*, and whatever you may currently feel about Brooks (or the NYT, for that matter), it's—well, I was going to say “amusing,” but looking back at it now, I wonder.

Here's the lede:

Little boys and girls in ancient Athens grew up wanting to be philosophers. In Renaissance Florence they dreamed of becoming Humanists. But now a new phrase and a new intellectual paragon has emerged to command our admiration: The Thought Leader.

Still possibly amusing...but it feels a little more threadbare (and with the seemingly obligatory swipe at the Clintons) than I would have thought at the time. Hindsight is a bitch.

Really Cheap Tube Amps

Really? An amplifier for \$50—with tubes, no less? That's the theme of this July/August 2016 *Sound & Vision* roundup, finding three units (all headphone amps—they're flea-power amps) between \$35 and \$68. More remarkably, Geoffrey Morrison thought two of the three sounded pretty good. The loser? The most expensive unit, which he says has “no pesky highs or lows” and sums up as “If it were a knife, it couldn't cut hot margarine.” (You can also get \$50ish solid-state headphone amps that use a lot less power and are portable, but they don't have Glowing Tubes.) His favorite: the \$50 Nobsound NS-08E, which is actually a hybrid amp, with solid-state output stages. The \$35 SainSonic Biggermouth A1 also sounded pretty good, but apart from other issues it lacks a power switch. Seriously.

Lol My Thesis

The name [and URL](#) may be all you really need to know: it's a set of thesis titles with snarky headlines. Most of the theses are undergrad, and this is definitely lighthearted. Sometimes there's even a link to the thesis itself, as in this startling title: “[Single sample statistics: exercises in learning from just one example.](#)” It would appear that the proprietors remove thesis titles if there are issues—leaving the snarky headline and institution.

What Does it Sound Like?

The July/August 2016 *Sound & Vision* ends with a “premiere design” feature on the Akoustic Arts A Directional speaker—the “speaker only you

can hear.” Models are either \$600 or \$1,000 and the larger one has 200 tiny little transducers in an 8” x 8” x 1” body.

There’s just one tiny little thing missing from this discussion (setting aside issues of power requirements, whether stereo is feasible—presumably for \$2,000—and why folks wouldn’t just get a good set of headphones for a lot less money if they want personal sound). To wit: is the speaker any damn good? *What does it sound like?* By every indication, the writer of the piece never listened to one.

There may be a reason for that. The crowdfunded speaker (produced in France) was funded in April 2016, with delivery to those funders promised in September. The company website says, on December 12, 2016, “coming soon.” Checking Indiegogo shows lots of excuses, the decision to screw crowdfunders by shipping any 2016 production to new customers to deal with “treasury problems”—but then they say that’s just a “couple of speakers” and not a production run, since otherwise they’re violating Indiegogo terms...well, at least they got loads of free publicity. (I do mean *loads*: it shows up lots of places on the web.)

Pay What You Wish

[Cites & Insights](#) carries no advertising and has no sponsorship. It does have costs, both direct and indirect. If you find it valuable or interesting, you are invited to contribute toward its ongoing operation. The Paypal donation button (for which you can use Paypal or a credit card) is on the [Cites & Insights home page](#). Thanks.

Masthead

Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large, Volume 17, Number 2, Whole # 201, ISSN 1534-0937, a periodical of libraries, policy, technology and media, is written and produced irregularly by Walt Crawford.

Comments should be sent to waltcrawford@gmail.com. *Cites & Insights: Crawford at Large* is copyright ©2016 by Walt Crawford: Some rights reserved.

All original material in this work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License](#).

URL: citesandinsights.info/civ17i2.pdf