

Cites & Insights

Crawford at Large

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Perspective

On the Literature

I believe that gray literature—blogs, this ejournal, a few similar publications and some lists—represents the most compelling and worthwhile literature in the library field today.

To a great extent, the formal literature now serves as history, explication, formal results of formal research studies and background; the action is in the informal literature.

I don't think I would have said that a decade ago, and maybe not five years ago. If I had aspirations to be a respected scholar, I might not say it today.

"Compelling and worthwhile" doesn't necessarily imply scholarly or authoritative. Are blogs either scholarly or authoritative? A good question, one I may not be qualified to answer.

The Book and the Post

I've grown to rely on liblogs as my primary sources for contemporary library issues over the last two or three years. The extent of that reliance became obvious in *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change*. John Dupuis picked up on this in his superb review (June 6, 2007 at *Confessions of a science librarian*, jdupuis.blogspot.com). The relevant passage:

Another really interesting thing about this book was how it advanced the form of scholarship. Here's a self-published book with very serious intentions, not lightweight at all, which mostly referenced blogs in the bibliography. I find that really interesting. A book that's about how librarians should engage the most important issues in their professional practice and it's mostly propelled by bloggers and not by reams of articles in the official scholarly journals. By my quick count, 151/187, or about 80% of the items in the bibliography are blog posts. And he makes us sound pretty good too. And I'm not saying that because my blog appears three times in the bibliography. For the most part, Crawford showcases the best writing

and the best thinking out there among the liblogs (except for Chapter 8, mentioned above, but even that showcases some real passion too); we are committed and engaged and thinking about the issues. If you are a liblogger and your colleagues are a bit skeptical about the the worth of what you are doing, show them this book. What we do, if we do it well, is worthy for our tenure files, for our professional CV's. Our work on our blogs should be counted the same as any one else's contributions in traditional media based on its intrinsic quality not its format or place of publication. Thanks to Crawford, we have an example of what we are capable of presented in a somewhat more traditional format and written by someone whose contributions to the field cannot be easily dismissed. We appreciate the support.

"We are committed and engaged and thinking about the issues." Indeed we are; that comes through more and more in several hundred liblogs.

"If you are a liblogger and your colleagues are a bit skeptical about the the worth of what you are doing, show them this book." Please do...and show them this PERSPECTIVE as well. Of course, if they've never heard of me or write me off as one of those flaky bloggers, it may not help—but, you know, I have published more than a dozen books in the library field through traditional means, so I'm not entirely a self-publishing nonentity.

Inside This Issue

Perspective: On Authority, Worth and Linkbaiting.....	4
Perspective: On Disagreement and Discussion.....	8
Perspective: On Ethics and Transparency.....	17
Offtopic Perspective: 50-Movie Classic Musicals Part 2....	22

"What we do, if we do it well, is worthy for our tenure files, for our professional CV's. Our work on our blogs should be counted the same as any one else's contributions in traditional media based on its intrinsic quality not its format or place of publication." Dupuis is making an explicit case that quality blogging *should* count as professional work. I believe he's right. If I've helped that cause along by offering

“an example of what we are capable of presented in a somewhat more traditional format and written by someone whose contributions to the field cannot be easily dismissed,” I’m only too happy to have done so.

I didn’t think about those issues when I was preparing the book. I knew that most of the relevant source material was in blogs. Posts were—*are*—much timelier than the formal literature. The book appeared in March 2007. The most recent cited material is from February 2007. That material reflects thinking and library experience as of February 2007—making it six months to a year (or more) more timely than almost anything in refereed literature.

By June 13, 2007, it was clear to me that I needed to write this essay, so I did a “pre-essay” post at *Walt at Random*, including the quoted material above. Some of the rest of that post, noting that the reference to Michelle Boule partly deals with another controversy not followed here:

Formal language does not grant authority. And it is certainly not the case that proper columns in print publications (in the library field or anywhere else) avoid informal language and personal observations. I’m sure there are publications with such rigid Editorial Standards that all columns are mangled into Proper Lifeless Neutral Prose, but I give up on such publications pretty quickly. Columns **should** function differently than formal articles, just as scholarly articles should function differently than other kinds of articles and reports even in the same journal.

Let’s go a little further. In the library field, it is my belief that degrees don’t confer authority, that the form of publication doesn’t confer meaningful authority, and that the concept of The Important People and the rest of us has long outworn its shelf life.

Michelle Boule (“Jane”) says useful and important things—some of which I disagree with (this is by no means a bad thing). She also posts casual blog entries that are part of real life. That’s exactly, **precisely** as it should be; it’s how her blog works and intelligent readers have (I believe) no difficulty distinguishing the off-the-cuff remarks from the serious arguments.

I believe in print publications and the role of refereed articles...as part, but not all, of an increasingly complex set of media and interactions. I also believe that blogs serve increasingly important roles in exposing and discussing real-world issues in librarianship (and other fields, of course).

I followed the excerpt from Dupuis’ review with this note: “That was not accidental, and the shift in source material for *Cites & Insights* has not been (entirely) accidental” and a note that I needed to write up what I’m thinking and doing—this PERSPECTIVE.

Scholarly, Authoritative, Timely?

I’m really not sure *what* to say about authority. I believe every named blogger offers informed, knowledgeable views on what’s actually happening where they are (“named” because some pseudonymous and anonymous blogs may be more facetious). They are authoritative in the sense of being credible within their own sphere. Authoritative as in *The Final Word*? I don’t believe such authority exists within librarianship, except for factual matters. Librarianship isn’t a religion. The issues worth discussing do not admit of authoritative statements. To take one example, if someone says “Games have no place in libraries, period,” the proper response is a razzberry—and that’s the same response appropriate if anyone was so brash as to say “Every library must be gaming to survive.” I could provide dozens of such examples. (Everything should be formally cataloged? It is to laugh! Cataloging is passé, tagging can do it all? It is also to laugh!)

Eric Schnell comments in a May 31, 2006 post at *The medium is the message* (ericschnell.blogspot.com), “Is blogging scholarly communication?” In part:

Blogs have enabled academics to connect with a larger general readership for their insight and expertise. Blogs also allow for a more relaxed discourse... While there are issues relating to preserving the historical record of our profession’s communication, this is a technology issue and not a part of this discussion.

Blogging does have a real intellectual value. It meets the goal of scholarship and service that leads to national and/or international recognition that at the heart of the promotion and tenure process and is consistent with the mission of most academic organizations. However, blogging is not conventional academic writing. It does not fill the requirement that a publication be reviewed by peers before publication or dissemination.

I do appreciate the intent and purpose of the blind review process. In many professions the validation of research is a life and death situation. In library science what is the purpose? Is it to simply make sure submissions are within the scope of the journal? It is purely for editorial consistency? Or is the reason we pre-review is to identify those communications which are significant contributions to the profession?

The real time nature of blogging allows me to get my ideas out faster, and receive feedback faster. I am able to clarify my ideas based on often very critical comments. A print article pre-reviewed by three people may be cited over time or a blog posting that receives a dozen immediate comments and spawns a real time critical discourse on the challenges libraries are facing today, not a year ago. Which communication method is more valuable to the advancing the library as a profession?

Additionally, some of my electronic scholarly communication is more significant than if I were to hardcode my developing ideas on paper and submit them to a journal in which a handful of people may read before it may be published. It is also not uncommon for a print journal to take over a year to publish a paper. This is way too long for anyone who writes about technology issues. E-journals have shortened that turnaround time but still do not carry the same impact factor as print...

It is a mistake for promotion and tenure committees and academics in general to dismiss blogging altogether. In fact, some part of the blog concept may very well be the future of scholarly communication. Still, any junior faculty member that wants to get tenure should be careful that blogging does not eat up time that could be devoted to working on articles or a book.

When I picked up a printout of that post to comment on it, I didn't realize it was May 2006 rather than May 2007. I suspect the argument would be roughly identical a year later, but I could be wrong. In later essays, Schnell noted the rough metrics I used in *LOOKING AT LIBLOGS: THE GREAT MIDDLE* (*C&I* 6:10, August 2006) as offering "interesting ideas" for quantifying the impact of a blog, one measure of scholarly significance. He focuses on the number of links to a blog as "perhaps the strongest indicator," and I'll suggest it would be stronger if limited to a single post (thus eliminating blogrolls). It's certainly comparable to the citation counts used in judging "impact" for traditional journals and articles—and, as one of the most cited authors in library literature, I can aver that being cited doesn't automatically mean being "scholarly" by some traditional metrics. If it means being significant, hey, I can accept that. (In another post, Schnell notes being invited to participate on two panels based on a blog post—another indication of scholarly impact.)

Much more recently (July 3, 2007), Schnell posted about a slightly worse than typical delay for a *formal*, peer-reviewed, print publication and its implications in "Where is my manuscript?" Coincidentally, Michael Sauers (who, like me, has a strong publication record but rarely writes scholarly articles) posted "I've been peer-reviewed" at *The travelin' librarian* (www.travelinlibrarian.info) on the same day.

Schnell's story, in brief: He had a manuscript accepted for publication in a library journal in early 2005; after the normal review processes. He was informed it would appear in the summer of 2006. That's a significant delay, but never mind.

That time came and went.

Wondering what happened, I looked at the publishers web site. I noticed the issue was pushed out until early

2007. No big deal to me since, for promotion and tenure purposes, having a manuscript accepted for publication is (almost) as good as being published—quality indicators aside.

Once again, that time came and went.

I went back to the publishers site, which now indicated that the issue would not be out until August 2007...

This is the second time something weird has happened to a manuscript with this publisher.

If it were not for this antiquated notion that only pre-publication peer-reviewed print publications hold any value as scholarly communication for promotion and tenure purposes I wouldn't even bother publishing in print.

Blogging supports all the reasons one publishes; to communicate ideas and research, impact on profession, personal and organizational reputation. Blogging allows one to communicate ideas and receive immediate feedback. It allows one to flush out ideas. While one could argue that comments and others blog postings based on a single post are indeed peer review, blogging is problematic for promotion and tenure primarily since there is no pre-publication peer-review.

Anyone out there have a credible blogmetrics algorithm?

A one-year delay in communicating a *contemporary* discussion is difficult in any case, but it's worth noting that I'm citing a year-old post in this essay. *Two years?* For any contemporary issue, that ages the article so severely as to substantially reduce its usefulness. Consider Schnell's antepenultimate paragraph (beginning "If it were not..."). If you've served on editorial boards or had refereed papers published, ask yourself: Does peer review within librarianship actually result in papers that are uniformly better than the best blog entries (or essays in *Cites & Insights*)?

Really?

For that matter, can you deny the cynical truism that peer review doesn't determine *whether* a paper will be published, but only *where* it will be published?

Which would you pay more attention to, and which would you regard as more likely to move discussion forward in useful ways: An article in a third-tier print journal by someone you've never heard of, or an "unrefereed" blog post by, say, Lorcan Dempsey or Eric Schnell or Laura Cohen or Iris Jastram or, for that matter, Mark Lindner or Walt Crawford?

For Sauers, his peer-reviewed article is actually his *first*—a little unusual for someone with his track record. He regards peer review as a "nice added bonus," since he's not an academic. But he also says:

I do have one, not so much complaint, as a concern over this whole experience: the fact that an article I submitted

to the journal back in July 2006, wasn't published until July 2007. One year for a technology article to see print. These days that's not even vaguely fast enough...

The world of peer-reviewed journals is not mine. I don't have suggestions for fixing this, nor will I spend all that much time on it. I just needed to say all this, as I'm sure I'm not the only author with these concerns.

Cites & Insights essays tend to trail the posts that they're based on by anywhere from two to eight months, sometimes more—but at least the posts are fresh. Delayed commentary makes sense. In a growing number of areas, one-year delays in primary articles may *not* make sense (much less two-year delays).

Scholarly? Eric Schnell would like to think so. Authoritative? Yes, I believe, in different ways than the theoretical authority conveyed by peer review. Timely? Absolutely, far more so than any traditional journals, and that may be critical for many contemporary discussions.

It was certainly critical for *Balanced Libraries: Thoughts on Continuity and Change*. That book primarily reflects *changes* in the landscape since Midwinter 2006 (put in a broader perspective); it could not have come out the way it did if it was based on traditional source materials.

Print and History Still Matter

For me, blogs now represent a critical part of the library literature, perhaps the most important part of my own source material.

That does not mean print is dead. It certainly doesn't negate the value of journals, the use of peer review (even if it's easy to be snarky about it), the worth of carefully-prepared monographs.

Three posts address these issues in different ways. In the interest of space and because I don't think any of the posts (and attached comments) lend themselves well to excerpts, I'm just going to point you to them:

- Laura Cohen asks "What is worth publishing in print?" at *Library 2.0: An academic's perspective* on June 21, 2007 (liblogs.albany.edu/library20/). She thinks some publications should be on wikis rather than in journals and offers reasons for and against print publication.
- Mark Lindner asks "Keeping up, why is it always forward-thinking?" at *Off the Mark* on June 28, 2007 (marklindner.info/blog/). He's noting the value of history within librarianship or any other field—asserting that reading

the "old stuff" should be considered part of keeping up. It's a casual but significant commentary, well worth thinking about; a range of comments follows.

- Stephanie Brown asks "Blog- or print publishing?" at *CogSci librarian* on July 17, 2007 (cogscilibrarian.blogspot.com), after this essay was originally drafted. She'd like to see a conversation going: Does it matter that librarians are writing more in blogs than in print?

For now, for here, I'll stick with the heading for this section. Print and history *do* still matter. I did not say that blogs were *the* professional literature; I believe they are now an important **part** of that literature. The refereed literature is another important part, perhaps less important by comparison than in years past—and books continue to provide history and fundamental checkpoints for the continuing issues. I'll continue to pay attention to all of them; so should you.

Perspective

On Authority, Worth and Linkbaiting

Yes, it's the dreaded Britannica Blog essay. Yes, I'm late to the game. No, this is not primarily about Michael Gorman, although his blogging (*his blogging!*) plays a crucial role in the discussion. There will be no fisking here, tempting though it might be—either of Gorman's posts or of some over-the-top responses.

This is a scattered essay. We begin with blog posts from an anti-blogger that really don't address the asserted topic and go from there. I bring biases to the discussion, to be sure:

- If authority and worth require advanced degrees and credentials, then what to make of my 15 books and several hundred articles, given my complete lack of advanced degrees and credentials?
- Once upon a time, I cowrote a book with Michael Gorman. Years before that, I suffered (indirectly, in the workplace) as the result of an intemperate article he wrote. Times change, and change again.

There's going to be a *lot* of summarizing and referencing here, with very few quotes and relatively few URLs. There's too much source material to deal with—and I don't believe this particular "controversy"

deserves lots of space. My one-word dismissal of the whole affair (“silly”) almost seems adequate, except that some interesting issues are raised. I also discuss “authority” in PERSPECTIVE: ON THE LITERATURE.

Where Ideas Matter?

That’s the motto for *Britannica blog* (blogs.britannica.com/blog/). It’s a trifle arrogant, given the tens of thousands of blogs where ideas clearly matter (including the majority of liblogs, as far as I can tell). The company signed up quite a range of bloggers and says this:

Bloggers are here at Encyclopædia Britannica’s invitation, and we choose them for their ideas and their ability to think, write, enlighten, and entertain. They’re free to express their opinions within reason. We don’t ask them to be objective, only rational. We try to achieve a kind of objectivity in the aggregate—*balance* might be a better word—by publishing, in the fullness of time, advocates for all reasonable positions on major controversies.

You’d have to go through the author bios to see whether you consider the set of authors “balanced” or whether they’re likely to cover “all reasonable positions on major controversies”—of course, “reasonable” covers a lot of ground. While the blog does support commenting, it’s moderated (perhaps of necessity).

Here are the rules as stated for the blog:

- No bigotry
- No profanity
- No advocating violence or flagrantly immoral conduct
- No pornography or links thereto
- No personal attacks. Intellectual argument is fine, but please, nothing ad hominem.
- Nothing that would offend most reasonable people
- No purely or primarily commercial messages
- No spam. As a definition of spam, we like that of blogger.org: “nonsense unrelated to the discussion,” though we reserve the right, on occasion, to delete even relevant nonsense or irrelevant sense.

Does Britannica follow its own rules? That depends on your definition of “bigotry”—but more, perhaps, on whether *ad hominem* applies to attacks on *groups* of people or only to attacks on named individuals. I’m not prepared to judge, at least not yet.

I’m focusing on the blog because of something Seth Finkelstein (and, I believe, others) have suggested: That the controversy over Michael Gorman’s posts is, at least to some extent, linkbaiting—behavior designed to increase the number of inbound links to *Britannica blog*, increasing its visibility on search en-

gines. If that’s true, it seems to be working: Google shows a PageRank of 7 in early July 2007, a level that usually takes a while to reach. (For example, *librarian.net* and *The shifted librarian* both have 7 PageRank, but *LibrarianInBlack* and *TametheWeb* are at 6, as are *Walt at Random* and *Cites & Insights*—although the old *C&I* site eventually made it to 7.)

Was this genuine controversy or incited controversy? A number of high-profile bloggers apparently got email from Britannica noting the Gorman posts and inviting comments. Other Britannica bloggers were poised to respond to Gorman. I will give Gorman himself the benefit of the doubt and not presume that he was setting out to incite controversy for the sake of controversy. I’m not inclined to be so generous regarding Britannica—and, frankly, I wonder why the firm is so anxious to have a hot blog.

The *Encyclopædia Britannica* (henceforth *EB*) is a reputable print encyclopedia also available in digital form. Authoritative? It’s hard to say whether *any* general-purpose encyclopedia can be considered authoritative on all matters. *Wikipedia* is clearly a much better source in many areas. While some editions of *EB* have been remarkable combinations of scholarly essays, it’s never been the best encyclopedia for all uses or all users. No encyclopedia can be—and general encyclopedias are rarely the best sources for in-depth knowledge. I gather *EB* wants to be seen as hip and high tech. Will this blog help that effort, or will it make *EB* seem laughable? Your guess is as good as mine.

Maybe this section is all that needs to be said about linkbaiting. *EB* commissioned (or at least invited) Michael Gorman (and others) to write controversial posts. Gorman certainly complied. *EB* set out to make sure others commented on those posts by making sure they *knew* about them. If other bloggers write heated or inflammatory responses? So much the better, at least for linkbaiting purposes.

The posts themselves aren’t about linkbaiting, at least on the surface. They’re listed as part of the “Web 2.0 forum” but also carry “Libraries” as one of several descriptors. They are very much about authority, at least in part.

Web 2.0: The Sleep of Reason

That’s the title for Gorman’s two-part post (oddly, given that neither post is very long—and even more oddly given that others speak of it as a *three-part* post) of June 11, 2007. It gets off to a truly awful start as he seems to blame Web 2.0 for public credulity, making a

connection between Web 2.0 and “believers in Biblical inerrancy” and rejection of scientific truth that strikes me as improbable and wholly unproven. He also says “Bloggers are called ‘citizen journalists,’” which as a flat statement is simply false: Bloggers are called bloggers. A few of them act as (and are sometimes called) citizen journalists.

Later in Part I, Gorman says “Human beings learn, essentially, in only two ways”—from experience and “from people who know more than they do” and proceeds to establish conditions necessary for the indirect form of the second way (that is, learning from a text). I blush to admit that, given Gorman’s conditions, *none* of my books are of any worth for learning, any more than is any book written by a writer who isn’t a topical expert. I find that conclusion dismaying, to be sure—but also irrelevant to Web 2.0, as is the discussion of intelligent design.

If Part I seems entirely offtopic, Part II is strange and loaded with hyperbole. Gorman discusses digital collectivists who flee from expertise and shun gatekeepers. He quotes Andrew Keen with admiration in his contempt for “creative amateurs” (a singularly ahistoric contempt—for example, there would be no films if there hadn’t been self-taught filmmakers—but I’ll hold off until I read Keen’s book). Gorman seems to assert that “the impulse behind Web 2.0” is that *everyone should* use digital media to express themselves, a curious reading of technologies that lower the bar for those who *choose* to express themselves. Gorman refers sadly to “a world in which everyone is an expert in a world devoid of expertise,” which appears wrong on both counts. (In fact, everyone is an expert on something—and every sane person recognizes they’re not an expert on everything and need to look for other expertise.) Then there are two sentences that must be quoted, given the level of confusion and zero-draft writing reflected in these posts:

Good clear writing is more than a vehicle for conveying knowledge and information—it is an authentic expression of human personality. Bad writing is, all too often, the outward manifestation of inward confusion and lack of clarity, as is bad organization or the lack of organization.

If I had to sum up the two-part post, I would say that it has little if anything to do with Web 2.0, that Gorman has managed to blame a recent set of innovations for intellectual failings of the last century and more, and that there’s really very little here. I called it “silly” at the time and annotated the printout as “Not W2, but mostly harmless blather.” On its own, it wouldn’t

deserve the 400+ words just spent on it—and maybe it doesn’t. It’s odd that Gorman calls a post a blog, but it’s a new medium for him. (If you read this, Michael, that’s synecdoche, equivalent to calling a scholarly article a “journal”: an individual essay within a blog is either a post or an entry.)

But of course it garnered many times as much text—in direct comments, in posts on other blogs, and in follow-up posts at the *Britannica blog*. As of July 7, 2007, Bloglines shows 537 posts referring to that essay—and that’s limiting the search to blogs with at least two Bloglines subscribers. Google shows about 15,300 results for [“sleep of reason” gorman]—and I’ve read only a couple dozen with no plans to read more. Sampling a few drops from that sea of commentary, I see that Meredith Farkas (*Information wants to be free*, meredith.wolfwater.com) credits him with bringing up interesting points (“if only Gorman could write in a more balanced manner”) but nails him for hyperbole near the beginning of a well-stated, thoughtful discussion that turns Gorman’s either-or into the “and” I’d prefer. Jessamyn West (*librarian.net*) wishes Gorman didn’t sound so “snooty” and discusses the differences between scholarship and real-life research—also noting that the new affordances (tags, blogging, etc.) “are offered as supplements to the existing canon of options, not as supplanters of them”). Jason Griffey (*Pattern recognition*, www.jasongriffey.net/wp/) hits Gorman pretty hard for his writing style and (lack of) clear organization and notes the proud history of “citizen journalism” in the U.S., going back at least to Thomas Paine. One comment on that post bothers me, as it seems to dismiss peer review as being inferior to blog feedback—a jump I’m not ready to make. That’s just June 12, 2007, and a tiny sampling of what was out there.

Another tiny sample from June 13, 2007. One liblogger starts out with an ad hominem attack and manages to misspell words (and choose the wrong words) often enough to support negative comments about blogs as writing. Seth Finkelstein discusses the post as a “link-baiting party” and Britannica’s cleverness in “pushing the buttons of the blogger mindset so as to get its ideas spread much further than otherwise.” Dorothea Salo finds it all terribly funny—although there’s of irritation behind that laughter. (In the course of Salo’s commentary at *Caveat lector*, caveat.yarinareth.net, she says Gorman’s “repellent condescension crisscrosses *every bit* of his written output” [emphasis added]. I’m compelled to object to that as

coauthor of *Future Libraries: Dreams, Madness & Reality*—even if, at least at the moment, I regard Salo more highly than Gorman.) John Miedema (johnmiedema.wordpress.com) sees eye-to-eye with Gorman on the importance of print—but believes (as do I) that the whole “digital Maoism” schtick is primarily a strawman, not useful in reasoned debate. Miedema also adds an interesting point: “Note that blogs represent an evolution of something that was happening in the world of the print monopoly—academics talked in informal fashion in their offices and at conferences, inviting students and others to join those conversations.” Barbara Fister, writing at *ACRlog* (acrlblog.org), questions the assumption that people learn in only two ways and thinks this oversimplification is typical of “the trouble with diatribes.” Matthew Battles, writing at *Britannica blog* (as an invited blogger, not a commenter), notes the strangeness of conflating blogging and intelligent design and points up examples of Web 2.0 tools fostering and empowering *responsible* individual expression, including legitimate “citizen journalists.” He notes (correctly) that experience, expertise and authority *do* retain their power—but there are also new tools “to discover and amplify individual expertise.” It’s a good essay. So, in parts, is Clay Shirky’s response “Old revolutions good, new revolutions bad,” which appeared June 13 at *Many2Many* and later at the *Britannica blog*. Clay Shirky is, in my mind, the little girl with the little curl on her forehead: When he’s good, he’s very, very good—but he can also be fairly horrid, sometimes in the same essay. Shirky notes the fallacy of equating Biblical literalism and the like with Web 2.0, that bloggers aren’t *generally* called citizen journalists, and that *Wikipedia* is very much on the side of scientific method. Things get worse near the end of the essay, particularly when Shirky makes this astonishing and offensive statement:

Academic libraries, which in earlier days provided a service, have outsourced themselves as bouncers to publishers like Reed-Elsevier; their principal job, in the digital realm, is to prevent interested readers from gaining access to scholarly material.

Note that Shirky is one of those who do *not* see folksonomy as complementing taxonomy; he regards taxonomy as obsolete and has said so.

And On it Goes...But Not Here

We come to June 19, 2007 and another double Gorman post, “The siren song of the internet.” The first

part seems mostly to reiterate things we said a dozen years ago about “information” and the usage of ebooks—but with a sentence that confounds me entirely: “The reason is that information, properly defined, is especially amenable to being stored and transmitted digitally whereas recorded knowledge in the form of scholarly monographs, literary texts, and complex texts of the kind found in major encyclopedias is not.” I’m sorry, Michael, but that’s nonsense. We may prefer to read long text in print form—I know I do, and as you say, so do most other people (including young people)—but *anything* that appears in print can also be “stored and transmitted digitally” without difficulty, certainly including scholarly monographs and literary texts.

Part II tears into Google and its ilk—and then somehow asserts a “concerted and multifront assault on copyright” related to a lack of respect for the text. And, later, the clear suggestion that increased plagiarism stems from lack of “respect for the creations of individual minds.” Gorman then puts blogs in their place: after a claim to have “done research,” “what *invariably* follows [emphasis added] is a torrent of half-baked ideas, urban myths, and political vituperation.” *Invariably*. This is so astonishingly overbroad and false—well, but of course, it must also apply to the post itself! Thus, since Gorman has labeled *his own work* as a “torrent of half-baked ideas...,” we are spared any need for serious discussion of that work. (He does mention claims of people to have “done research” before this vast generalization on the results—but in his very first post, Gorman comments on his research work. So there it is.)

I could note Aaron Dobb’s thoughtful comments on lengthened copyright terms; I could note Clay Shirky’s commentary—including his *absolutely false* (for public libraries) assertion that “use of the physical holdings of libraries are falling” (ungrammatical as well as untrue); I could discuss Jimmy Wales silliness and a craptastic post from Andrew Keen.

I could go on to Gorman’s “Jabberwiki” post—in two parts, which seems a constant mannerism of Gorman’s descent into the cesspool of blogging. He takes on Wikipedia at length, drawing an extended set of contentious comments on all sides of the issue. I’ve covered that ground in the past, and am likely to in the future; I don’t find that Gorman brings anything particularly new or revealing to the discussion.

But I won’t. There’s simply too much to discuss, much of it not worth the discussion.

Conclusions

- “Question authority” may have been a slogan of the 60s, but it’s an imperative for thoughtful people that goes back *at least* to Martin Luther and (realistically) probably as far back as there have been authority figures.
- Worth and meaning don’t arise from degrees or certification and aren’t limited to those considered authorities.
- There is no correlation between Web 2.0 (whatever that means) and ignorance or rejection of authority. There is good reason to believe that increased access to means of distribution will reduce ignorance in the long run.
- We learn in many ways. Much of that learning has always been from interaction among peers, not merely from sitting at the feet of great teachers. It’s not uncommon to learn from someone with less formal knowledge than you have in an area.
- Whatever its faults, *Wikipedia* does *not* suffer from rejection of authoritative *sources*. Indeed, one of those faults may be the insistence that only printed sources matter.
- If (as I believe) the *Britannica Blog* intended to increase its visibility through created (and possibly artificial) controversies, it worked—and libloggers fell right into the plan.
- Personal attacks undermine reasoned arguments, even if the attacks are against people given to attacks on their own side. Two wrongs continue not to make a right.

But who cares about my conclusions? After all, I’m an uncredentialed non-expert and this discussion wholly lacks bibliography and comparative literature review.

Perspective

On Disagreement and Discussion

Are librarians willing to disagree with one another?

What a silly question. Of course we are (I’m counting myself as a librarian for this discussion). Consider some disagreements I’ve chronicled and taken part in here and in my blog, just for starters.

Steven Bell’s been interpreted as saying that we don’t disagree when it counts, or that we don’t dis-

agree *enough*—and maybe there’s a point there. Are librarians sufficiently forthright in their discussions and disagreements? Can we disagree without being disagreeable? Can we—*do we*—debate and discuss positions without viciousness, toxicity, *ad hominem* and attempts to foreclose effective disagreement?

I think the answer is still yes, at least some of the time, but it’s a more complicated answer.

This essay has been brewing for a long time, perhaps two years or more. It began heating up in the last few months, boiling over in a “pre-essay” that appeared May 17, 2007 on *Walt at Random* (quoted in its entirety below). *I may be wrong* about my general conclusions and some of the details—but in this case, I really don’t think so.

Beginnings: Silence in the Stacks

Let’s start with “Silence in the stacks,” a June 9, 2005 article by Scott McLemee in *Inside higher ed* that quotes Steven Bell on the paucity of academic librarians blogging *about* academic library issues (insidehighered.com/views/2005/06/09/mclemee). Full disclosure: Steven Bell is a friend and has been one for quite a few years. We disagree on a number of issues—and do so agreeably. Bell is an academic librarian. I am obviously not.

McLemee wondered how an outsider “can keep up with what academic librarians are thinking about...issues.” He notes Bell’s *Kept-up academic librarian* (keptup.typepad.com/academic/) as one source and says Bell “for the most part avoids the kind of reflective and/or splenetic mini-essays one associates with blogdom.” Looking for other academic librarian blogs, he asked Bell directly: “Could he please name a few interesting blogs by academic librarians?”

His answer came as a surprise: “When you ask specifically about blogs maintained by academic librarians,” Bell wrote earlier this week, “the list would be short or non-existent.”

Bell goes on to qualify that comment, noting some early blogs by academic librarians and that most of these weren’t *about* academic library issues. McLemee had something fairly specific in mind: “public spaces devoted to thinking out loud about topics such as the much-vaunted ‘crisis in academic publishing.’ It was a puzzling silence.” To that, Bell responded:

“I can’t say any individual has developed a blog that has emerged as the ‘voice of academic librarianship,’” noted Bell in response to my query. “Why? If I had to advance a theory I’d say that as academic librarians we are still geared towards traditional, journal publishing as the way to express ourselves. I know that if I have some-

thing on my mind that I'd like to write about to share my thoughts and opinions, I'm more likely to write something for formal publication (e.g., see this piece.) Perhaps that is why we don't have a 'juicy' academic librarian out there who is taking on the issues of the day with vocal opinions."

And he added something that makes a lot of sense: "To have a really great blog you have to be able to consistently speak to the issues of the day and have great (or even good) insights into them — and it just doesn't seem like any academic librarian out there is capable of doing that. I think there are some folks in our profession who might be capable of doing it. But if so they haven't figured out yet that they ought to be blogging, or maybe they just don't have the time or interest."

McLemee saw a possible "solution":

The answer might be the creation of a group blog for academic librarians—some prominent in their field, others less well-known, and perhaps even a couple of them anonymous. No one participant would be under pressure to generate fresh insights every day or two. By pooling resources, such a group could strike terror in the hearts of budget-cutting administrators, price-gouging journal publishers, and even the occasional professor prone to associating academic stardom with aristocratic privilege.

A number of comments followed the piece, including Bell's own defense of the point McLemee was specifically trying to make.

In fact, the article *had* overlooked well-established blogs that dealt with academic library issues in 2005, if perhaps from specialized perspectives, such as *scitech library question (STLQ)*, *The ten thousand year blog*, *Scholarly electronic publishing blog* and *Confessions of a science librarian*.

McLemee's "solution" is problematic for a blog, in my opinion, even as it was partly realized in *ACRLog*. What appears to be needed are *many* voices in a range of blogs offering the kind of lively discussion we see within library blogs in general.

Over the past couple of years, more blogs by academic librarians have emerged, although relatively few of these bloggers feel constrained to write nothing but Serious Essays about Academic Library Issues. There's a tendency among bloggers to mix personal and professional. It's a tendency I share and applaud. Does that disqualify the professional entries from consideration? I can't imagine why it should—but it does make it easier to dismiss those entries.

I didn't comment on McLemee's article at the time. Actually, I'd forgotten it entirely—until Iris Jastram, an academic librarian who began her blog after McLemee's article appeared, commented on it in an

April 27, 2007 post at *Pegasus librarian* (pegasuslibrarian.blogspot.com). That post serves as a bridge from 2005 to 2007. Most of the post follows.

Clammering in the hallways

Scott McLemee, with the help of Steven Bell, declared quite some time ago that there's too much silence in the stacks. Apparently he couldn't find blogs that were specifically "maintained by academic librarians" and focused specifically on issues important to academic librarianship...

McLemee is not, apparently, saying that there aren't blogs out there that are both maintained by academic librarians and focused on academic librarianship... Instead, he maintains that his argument centers on two points. First, he is not aware of any blogs that have stepped up and become the "voice of academic librarianship." And second, the lack of such a voice is sapping the profession of its cultural capital...

I've already written that good, clear writing is essential to our profession. So on that point, I believe McLemee and I agree. Without clear and insightful writing we librarians can't hope to excel in academic environments because these environments eat, drink, and breathe scholarly writing. Scholarly writing is the lingua franca of our environments, and if we don't speak it, we essentially exclude ourselves from the societies in which we live and work.

I do not believe, however, that a blog—any blog—no matter how consistently insightful, would prove to our chosen culture that we are fluent in its language. In order to be seen as "full-fledged participants in contemporary intellectual life," we would have to publish in vehicles that are understood to be prestigious by our audiences (in our profession, academia, and the wider intellectual community). Currently, these only rarely include blogs or any other self-published vehicles.

And if what McLemee wants is "public spaces devoted to thinking out loud about topics" that are important specifically to academic librarians, and yet doesn't want "reflective and/or splenetic mini-essays," then blogs may never be the appropriate vehicle as blog posts, by their very format, lend themselves primarily to an op-ed style, much like McLemee's own essay.

So I would argue that yes, good and focused writing is essential to our profession. Librarians with the gift of insight and eloquence should be encouraged to pursue their talents for the good of the profession. And these writers should also contribute to the professional discussions that happen online, the visible "thinking out loud" that will in turn inform their thinking and writing. Blogging is very important, but it cannot be all things. Not yet. Not when we've set up our lives in the midst of academia.

And when I reference the online "discussions," I use the plural quite deliberately... There are myriad issues, and most can be approached in multiple ways. Because of

this, no single person can become the voice of the profession. And this is not a characteristic exclusive to academic librarianship... People can usually identify a handful of voices of Dickensian criticism or the theory of Universal Grammar, but it is impossible to identify the “voice of literary criticism” or “voice of linguistic analysis.” What is more, nobody thinks of this as a lack in either of those fields. Nobody calls this a “puzzling silence.”

What we do find are journals and publishing houses that take the lead in publishing the cream of the scholarly thought in those fields. In this way, McLemee’s idea of a group blog devoted to topics in academic librarianship makes sense. I would gladly subscribe to such a blog, and there are a few out there that I think contend for the title of academic blog for academic librarians, by academic librarians.

But even these blogs might fail to meet his expectations because issues that are important to academic librarians are also important to other types of librarians. Librarians in public and special libraries are just as engaged in “questions concerning public budgets, information technology, the cost of new publications, and intellectual freedom” as academic librarians are. I would argue that the different types of libraries are usually more the same than they are different. We may prioritize our foci differently, or emphasize certain parts of our missions differently. But for the most part, we care about the same issues and deal with the same or infinitely analogous challenges. Blogs focused on issues in academic librarianship may not, then, look very much different from blogs focused on public or special librarianship.

So perhaps there is silence in the stacks. But maybe that’s because the conversation isn’t happening in the stacks. Maybe the conversations are happening in the hallways. And maybe it’s hard to pick out the conversation because there are several, and maybe they’re happening concurrently and on multiple plains.

Jastrow makes points that deserve thought and frees me from having to make some of the same points—and those points *do* relate to the more current “discussion and disagreement” issue. Briefly:

- Academics will not take blogs by academic librarians as seriously as they take the formal literature.
- What’s needed is a range of discussions, not one “voice.”
- Most academic library issues are addressed by librarians outside academia, as they affect other types of libraries.

Fragmentation and Honest Discussion

Mark Lindner’s thought a lot about fragmentation and attempts to separate “personal” and “professional.” Lindner’s certainly not the only one (T. Scott Plutchak

and others have offered excellent posts in this area), but I find his February 7, 2007 essay particularly worth noting.

The full title is “Professionalism, fragmentation, moral minimalism and personal drama”; you’ll find it at *Off the Mark* (marklindner.info/blog/). I don’t want to derail this discussion, so I won’t go into great detail. Lindner favors open, honest discussion; he’s good at it. Here’s what he says near the top of the essay:

My hope is to start a conversation. Here. There. Everywhere. Privately. Publicly. In blogs. In professional journals. Wherever. Whenever. I do not want to be the moderator. I only want to be a spark. And a participant.

Just what is “professionalism,” particularly in the context of libraries? What is it as a concept and ideal? And what is it as it is embodied in practice? The second is the most important, by far. And they most certainly are not the same thing. Embodied practice rarely reaches to the level of principle or ideal, even though we ought to try.

There has been a lot of conversation in the biblioblogosphere lately about several topics that are highly related to this subject. Group think, over-niceness of librarians, who you represent when you write, personal behavior/ bullying, encouraging participation/ conversation and so on. There has also been much discussion of “professional experience” on the AUTOCAT discussion list lately, particularly in the area of job descriptions and also “professional” vs. paraprofessional.

The conversation on professionalism is a worthy one, but it’s not what I’m about here. But look at the first two sentences in the third paragraph. You want problems with discussion and disagreement? “Group think, over-niceness of librarians, who you represent when you write, personal behavior/bullying...” That’s a good list to start with.

Lindner mixes “so much personal and professional” in his blog. So do most of the bloggers whose writing and thoughts I admire. So does T. Scott Plutchak (mentioned by Lindner here). Unfortunately, what I said earlier is probably true: Absurd and even dangerous as it may be, it’s all too easy for Proper Scholars to dismiss serious, thoughtful blog entries about professional issues when the same blog includes personal commentary and when professional issues are discussed in a “personal voice” rather than a neutral “professional tone.” It can even seem as though no discussion is taking place—because it’s coming from *people* who choose not to fragment their personalities.

Lindner takes us back to his first blog in January 2005. Back then, he notes that his topics will include professional and personal issues, worries that he doesn’t have a real focus and thinks of blogging as

“narcissistic.” That same day he starts to get at the problem—how he had mastered “academic writing”—“analytic and synthetic, but dispassionate, and completely divested of one’s person, and particularly of one’s being”—and how much that was bothering him.

By May 2005 (the February 7, 2007 post links to these other posts), Lindner began to think of his blog as “a sort of sewing kit for my life and my narrative”—trying to reverse fragmentation and compartmentalization. He finds such fragmentation “dangerous and unhealthy for us as individuals, our society and the world as a whole.” (He also gets into “moral minimalism,” which I’m compartmentalizing out of this essay...) In a later May post (important on its own merits and discussing an academic library issue), he offers an important comment, placing himself firmly in the “I can be wrong *and am willing to be disagreed with*” category that’s so essential for open disagreement and discussion:

I often say things that could have been thought out better, or are even outright stupid; *we all do*. But I hope and desire to be called on them. Ask me to refine my comment or my argument. Present a side I haven’t considered or have too lightly dismissed.

In October 2005 he pokes at Jakob Nielsen’s

unspoken assumption that all blogs except those that “are really just private diaries” are actively trying to “reach new readers who aren’t your mother.” Underlying this assumption though is a far more insidious one; that we are all just selling a product, a corporate identity. Along with that assumption is one of extreme danger to human beings; that we must separate the personal from the public, “corporate” identity.

In November 2005, Lindner was wondering whether he should start a second blog devoted only to professional issues. Fortunately, he chose not to fragment his blogging.

In May 2006, Lindner discussed a situation where he felt under attack for disagreeing with someone else. In that post, he offers a few sentences that speak to what I’m getting at in this PERSPECTIVE:

Humans may be flawed, but we have discovered ways to resolve disagreements that fall far short of verbal or physical abuse.

Collegiality and professionalism are perfectly fine qualities. But they also often stand in the way of real dialogue and progress. That does not mean that they can be completely tossed aside. That is not what I am advocating. I am striving to find a way to be critical, as in offering critique, while remaining collegial and professional. That is a difficult balancing act, and no matter how well one succeeds many will consider any attempt to do so

an abject failure. Mind you, I am not even claiming that I am succeeding, only that I am striving to get there.

After that, an incident occurred. I won’t get into the incident; I will say it involved honest disagreement and attempts to discourage such disagreement—and that it hit Lindner pretty hard at the time. Following that incident, Lindner wrote the February 7, 2007 post. One of several excellent comments on the post (from *The pragmatic librarian*, excerpted) may be a good way to close this section:

Since I very recently started in the biblioblogosphere, I do not want to start making enemies (especially powerful ones). More or less related, I also do not want my skepticism about certain ideas to be perceived as personal attacks against those who advocate them. Besides, I’m still trying to figure out whether my own arguments are actually valid, so I shy away from “calling out” those with whom I disagree (in some cases, very strongly).

So, yes, I am also disheartened by the self-censorship we end up having to practice. However, since I have some self-doubt about my opinions, and I shift between the professional and personal in my postings, I keep struggling with ways give my “genuine self” a presence and voice online.

Blind posts *can* damage honest discussion. Some of us nonetheless do blind posts at times, much as we may hate them. Self-censorship *always* damages honest discussion. Some of us nonetheless censor our own writing at times for reasons of self-protection or, more sinister, to go along with (or be part of) the crowd.

We may never free ourselves from those obstacles to honest, open discussion and disagreement. We *should* be able to free ourselves from arbitrary distinctions between professional and personal. We *should* be able to speak in our own voices rather than neutral scholarly tones without having our thoughts dismissed as mere blogblather.

Incidents Along the Way

Daniel Cornwall posted “We need to talk to each other, not at each other” at *Alaskan librarian* on March 7, 2007 (alaskanlibrarian.blogspot.com). He quotes Mark Sanborn on the ways people talk *at* each other (labeling, name calling, provocations, accusations, belittling) and argues for civility: “We need to treat each other with dignity and respect if we are to make progress.” Sanborn says, “You must respect [others] enough to understand them even if you don’t agree with them,” certainly sound advice. Cornwall:

If you are getting a posting ready that opposes someone’s point of view, I beg you keep Mr. Sanborn’s words in mind... You don’t have to change your point of view. Just

talk to us like you would a loved one you were trying to persuade and not as a vicious/ignorant dog who must be put down for the good of all. Everyone will win!

While I agree that it makes little sense to try to convince people by beating up on them, I would also say there's a huge gap between loved ones and vicious/ignorant dogs—it's too easy for civility to be used as an excuse to avoid clear disagreement. I don't believe Cornwall's advocating that, but it's an issue.

On April 4, 2007, Ryan Deschamps posted "What the Library 2.0 crowd is trying to say about technology" at *The other librarian* (otherlibrarian.wordpress.com). At the heart of that post:

Technology has reached a stage that any idea to implement a technology ought to begin with a "yes."

I mean it. Begin with a "yes," then work through the barriers or fit the idea into a list of priorities after. No, that does not mean "implement new technology NOW!" It means "give us techies the benefit of the doubt and then determine if something is not sustainable, too resource-intensive or whatnot after we have had the opportunity to show you it can be successful."

Say "yes" and then say "let me see the model or plan" and then criticize it on its merits. Then do a 5-minute Google or Wikipedia search to find out what we are trying to do. Say "yes" first, then ask the hard questions and when the idea falls off the rails say "ok — let's look at this for another time."

Jennifer Macaulay commented on Deschamps' post in an April 11, 2007 post at *Life as I know it* (scruffyn-erf.wordpress.com), "Just say yes to technology?" Wildly oversimplifying Macaulay's post, she says:

I'm not convinced that just saying yes to ideas that involve technology is going to help resolve organizational issues... Technology is only a tool to try and accomplish something. I think that simply saying yes to technology doesn't take into account the human aspect, the human resistance to change and to technology, and/or the human fear of the unknown. I don't think it should be about the technology.

In comments, Mark Lindner noted Macaulay's "kindness and...detail," where his own critique would have been "saying Yes before even asking any questions is stupid; not good way to start a conversation." He found it "extremely simplistic and also ill-advised from a managerial perspective. Does anyone want a manager who immediately says yes to things and then after asking a few questions retracts that yes? Does anyone want to be that manager?"

Deschamps felt his remarks were being taken out of context. On April 27, 2007 he posted "Yes, I will Learn with you..." in which he says "my intention

was to highlight a dialectic between those who want to fight the so-called 'culture of no' and those who want to emphasize the need for planning and sustainability." He calls Lindner his "harshest critic" on the original post (citing the words from Lindner's comment I quoted above) and says that he *does* want to be "that manager" and believes the new generation of librarians "want precisely that kind of manager." There's more to the April 27 post, much of it concerned with the claim that "tech" solutions are less welcome than "traditional" ideas within libraries. Of course, two of his "non-tech" things are "renewing online resources" and "scheduling a whole slate of 'how to use a database' classes"—I guess the definition of "tech" changes over the years.

The next day, Lindner posted "Me? Harsh? OK." He notes to Deschamps: "If I was your 'harshest critic' then you were lucky. And, if you also mean that I was harsh then you have a lot of living to do." And here we're in the muddy waters of civility in real life. Lindner's comment was critical, honest and blunt—the way comments on blog posts tend to be. Was it harsh? You be the judge. Lindner does note that—just as I did—Deschamps chose not to include the beginning of Lindner's comment: "Well said, Jennifer. I, too, enjoyed Ryan's post and only had a problem with the same thing as you."

I'm ignoring all sorts of context. Given Lindner's full post, Deschamps came back and apologized for calling him harsh—clarifying that he was Deschamps' harshest critic, not necessarily harsh. (Maybe "toughest critic" would have been better?)

By the end of the comments on Lindner's post, it appears that Lindner and Deschamps agree a lot more than they disagree. Having discussed issues (and agreed and disagreed!) with both of them, that doesn't surprise me. The moral here—and the best reason to include this discussion—is that it shows part of the growing circle of library bloggers explicitly encouraging truly open discussion and disagreement. Despite some difficult language, this is a *success* story. Lindner and Deschamps and Macaulay felt free to disagree, sometimes subtly and at length (typically in posts), sometimes quickly and perhaps too bluntly (typically in comments). Nobody tried to beat down anyone else. Nobody took personal offense. Was the whole discussion civil? That depends on your definition of civility. By my standards, it was lively and effective.

Which takes us back to April 27 and another essay in *Inside Higher Ed...*

Good at Reviewing Books But Not Each Other

That's the title. The essay (insidehighered.com/views/2007/04/27/bell), four print pages plus more than twice that much in comments, starts with a bang-up paragraph and a final sentence that dumbfounds me:

Academic librarians are the nice guys of higher education. We dwell in neutral territory; the library belongs to no one and everyone. So do we. Our reputation is mostly one of being excruciatingly helpful. We give service with a smile. Our academic roost is a peaceful haven, and we welcome all. As an academic librarian who regularly navigates the library blogosphere, I find that the librarian's penchant for pleasantries extends to our own virtual nest. **In the world of library blogging the sky is always sunny, and nary is a dissenting or argumentative thought expressed.** [Emphasis added.]

Say what? Maybe Bell reads entirely different liblogs than I do, but I sure seem to remember the occasional dissent and argument, sometimes fairly heated. In the next paragraph Bell drops back to the traditional library literature, where he says "one rarely sees an article that takes issue with the research or perspectives of a particular author." Depending on your definition of "traditional library literature," that may be true. Scholarly journals operate with such extended lead times (and typically such requirements for format) that brisk discussions and disagreements may be muted by attenuation—by the time a *scholarly, refereed* response to a *scholarly, refereed* article appears, the issue in question has probably moved on.

Then Bell returns to library blogs: "It soon becomes apparent that the rules of disengagement dominate the landscape," claiming that instead we see a "repetitious flood" of me-too posts and "most comment is no better. It's mostly gratuitous back patting." He does think *ACRL*og may be an exception—but I don't see all that much brisk discussion and disagreement there.

Bell doesn't let up. Nobody defended Gorman in 2005 because people feared "underserved [sic] and irrational reprisal." [*Inside Higher Ed* **should** be copy-edited, so I play by stricter rules.] He believes "a speech chill has descended on the library blogosphere." He claims "more bloggers refuse to allow [comments] these days"—and few readers bother to read comments anyway. And he offers this analysis of the situation with Library 2.0 in 2006:

The essential trend of 2006 was Library 2.0. But exactly what it meant became the subject of some promising back and forth exchange among bloggers. As a far less

heated issue than Gorman's blogger incident, a few librarians felt encouraged to wade in against the tide to voice opinions that Library 2.0 was little more than old wine in a new bottle, a new fad for those who seek out new technology solutions before they've identified a legitimate problem. Library 2.0 advocates were quick to band together in a "they just don't get it" response. Ultimately groupthink won out over efforts to help all those interested in the topic to better understand it through thoughtful examination. Is it any surprise that few oppose the majority? And in the end the nice thing to do is just go along with the crowd.

Here's a relevant quote: "Most 'Library 2.0'-related discussion over the past few months has been *real* discussion—that is, discussion of issues, possibilities, philosophies, problems—rather than rallying cries to jump on a bandwagon or disputation over a name and its novelty. This is, I believe, a good thing." I believed that in June 2006 (the quote's from PERSPECTIVE: FINDING A BALANCE: LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS in *C&I* 6:9, July 2006) and I believe it now. As one who probably took as much heat as anyone for "just not getting it." I believe Bell's summary is just plain wrong. There was thoughtful examination. We did come to understand the topic better.

There's more to Bell's essay, much of which I agree with. For example:

Library educators should begin to integrate into the curriculum more opportunities for verbal and written discourse, as well as present students with case studies that serve as good examples of discourse and how it advances professional knowledge....

What academic librarianship shares with other disciplines is a seemingly never ending parade of controversial issues and challenges that invite the sharing of multiple, strong perspectives. If our future professionals can learn to appreciate and be inspired by the collegial expression of disagreement, it would serve well the future value of scholarly discourse in librarianship.

I can't agree with this sentence: "It is ironic that a profession dedicated to community building and embracing Web 2.0 has so miserably failed to create a conversation among its own members." The conversation began long ago and continues to this day. That conversation involves *hundreds* of people at blogs, in this ejournal, on lists and in library magazines. And, of course, in email, face-to-face, conference programs and other venues.

The comments are interesting. John Meier noted one real ongoing discussion (and set of disagreements) within library blogs, which I've recounted in previous issues. Laurence Creider noted the

FRBR/RDA debates. Bill Drew agreed that there are problems with discourse—and Blake Carver noted that there is rigorous discourse, “but you have to seek it out.” (He also notes, correctly, that there *were* bloggers who came to Gorman’s defense.) Ryan Deschamps admits that he’s more focused on making it work than on controversy, but notes some strong blogger disagreements about some aspects of social software. “Librarians may not be on the verge of a hockey fight, but we certainly don’t agree on everything”—as Deschamps knows from personal experience. Matthew Thomas distinguishes between rigorous professional literature (which he admits is lacking) and dissension as such. “Martin” provided the mandatory Old Fogey’s View, dismissing blogs as “little more than someone’s diary” and clarifying that “I have no desire to read your insipid maunderings or plow through your gripe lists or roll my eyes at your meaningless rants,” expressing his preference for a “well-thought-out, well-written academic article, please.” Interesting to find that as a comment on an op-ed piece, and even more interesting that one who explicitly ignores the gray literature can so readily find that it’s entirely worthless.

I commented as well—also ducking issues of academic rigor and the scholarly literature:

But I do have reasonable knowledge of library blogs, and I can’t entirely agree that dissent is either absent or smacked down.

To take the Library 2.0 example, it’s not that there weren’t bloggers who couldn’t see the point. There were. It’s that there was such a spectrum of Library 2.0 definitions and oppositions that it was difficult to carry on a coherent debate. I think I helped in that area by synthesizing much of what had been said, and I believe that discussions moved from somewhat meaningless debates to more meaningful, if perhaps “smaller” issues of appropriateness, diversity and the like.

I see a fair amount of healthy discussion within library blogs (most of which are signed). I also see occasional attempts to gang up on dissenters—but I see that happening less often and being ignored (or stood up to) more often.

One thing tends to warp perceptions on this and it’s not limited to library blogs: If there’s a debate, most commenters on a given post will tend to be on whatever side the post is on. Maybe that’s a good thing: I, for one, would rather see a reasoned refutation of my bad ideas appear on someone else’s blog (with a link) than buried in the comments on my own blog.

I’ll stress that last paragraph. Realistically, RSS assures that most blog readers will *not* encounter every com-

ment—and, unlike some political, technology and media blogs, most library blogs tend to have relatively few comments. Good discussions take place among different posts more often than within a comment conversation—although I’m delighted to note that *Walt at Random* and some other blogs offer occasional exceptions to that norm.

Other responses

Mark Lindner offered “Not disagreeable enough?” on April 28, 2007. Along with a real talent for careful thought, Lindner also has an occasional talent for bluntness, which Bell seems to covet. In this case, Lindner quotes the last sentence of Bell’s first paragraph (also quoted above) and responds:

You want dissent, Steven? Clearly that is *complete bullshit!* Dissent enough for you, Mr. Bell? I don’t know what parts of the biblioblogosphere you have been following, but you have clearly missed large parts. Unfortunately, much of the dissent has not been over substantial issues. Thus, I fully agree with Mr. Bell’s contention that the level of discourse needs to be raised.

Lindner doesn’t find the rosy picture of general agreement that Bell suggests. He is also visibly unhappy with the op-ed appearing as it did; he doesn’t think “willingness to disagree” is one of the librarianship issues that needs to reach a larger audience...or that raising it externally will encourage more dissent or disagreement, or raise the level of discourse. In comments following that post, I agreed “Some of us who could and should be disagreeing on issues feel less inclined than before to do so, because of the heat we’ve received.” That’s true, *and it’s a problem*, but at this point I don’t believe it chills discussion in general. Maybe my Candide nature has returned.

Academic librarian Angel Rivera posted “On library discourse?” May 2, 2007 at *The gypsy librarian* (gypsylibrarian.blogspot.com). Rivera reads the sunny, non-argumentative picture of blogging painted by Bell and wonders “just what corner of the library sector was Mr. Bell hanging out at.” He notes “Gormangate,” ongoing discussions over the value of ALA membership, the conference speaker compensation debate and “the whole 2.0 thing.” Rivera’s view of the *level* of discussion is less charitable than mine, but we agree that discussion and disagreement are taking place.

Then there’s the library literature, “and maybe there Mr. Bell has a good point. The fact is you can tell pretty much right away that a lot of LIS articles are just librarians writing something for their tenure dossiers. Substance is not always present in the LIS litera-

ture...” Whatever battles should be fought “certainly are not getting fought in the library literature.”

The point is that if any controversy does happen in our field, you see it in the blogs. It's the nature of the beast. Blogs are swift and easy to publish. You can get the ball rolling on the controversy du jour fast. And once the A-listers of our profession cover the issue or gripe du jour, it goes down the list like an avalanche, *ACRLog* included. Sometimes it's polite; sometimes it is not so polite. Academic journals simply do not lend themselves to fast and controversial discussions. If the topic has already visited the library sector of the blogosphere, by the time it gets on a journal, it's pretty much old news.

Then there are lists, where Rivera finds that civility sometimes “gets tossed out the window” as a topic “gets beaten to death.” I subscribe to very few library lists, but I certainly know whereof Rivera speaks.

On Disagreement: A Partial Pre-essay

At this point, it makes sense to include this post, which appeared May 17, 2007 on *Walt at Random*. Since I'm quoting myself, I'll incorporate it as text. I'm also including most of *most* comments, excluding one pseudonymous comment. The “on Monday” comment refers to my “Post-ALA, post-OCLC: What's next?” post of May 21, 2007, announcing my availability for other work starting October 1, 2007 (an availability that still stands as of this writing). I thought that was relevant since one of the points I make here is that it's easier to disagree when your economic future is assured—which, realistically, means you're independently wealthy or have tenure. I was reminded this year that many (most?) of us aren't in that position, no matter how long we've worked somewhere or how much we believe we've contributed. Here's the post:

Mark Lindner expressed the hope that I would follow up on an offhand comment in the June *Cites & Insights*—on page 6—to wit:

Deschamps' post also set off an interesting, sometimes heated discussion—and I may deal with that as part of a cluster about librarians' willingness to disagree with one another. But not in this installment!

As I commented on Mark's post, it was on my list—but maybe not with the emphasis Mark is interested in.

The essay, if and when it gets written, would deal with three issues (naturally beginning with Steven Bell's assertion that librarians don't disagree enough—a grotesque oversimplification of what he wrote, but hey, this is a pre-essay):

- A partial disagreement with the premise, since I **do** see a fair degree of principled, thought-

ful, non-vitriolic, non-ad hominem disagreement within discussions on library issues, here among libbloggers at least. **But...**

- It **is** tough to disagree with some people, either because you perceive them as so powerful that they can do you harm or because they have a tendency to take disagreement badly and have cliques ready to jump on you for disagreeing. I see good, vigorous disagreement within “trusted circles” where we've all pretty much agreed that disagreement is OK. I see good, vigorous disagreement with people so remote from the field that they're unlikely to notice or care. Then there's that tricky middle section...
- It's also difficult to take issue with popular positions or people when you're not in a tenured position or independently wealthy or retired or otherwise immune to economic realities.

I've become more aware of that third issue recently. “Speaking truth to power” is great fun, when power isn't likely to make or break your own future. Having the courage of your convictions is wonderful—but, you know, courage doesn't pay the bills.

I hate even saying that. I might not have been willing to say it, oh, a year ago. And if the issues are important enough, I'd like to believe I wouldn't say it now. But I'm a little less certain.

I was just going to comment on a near-cliche about situations where heated discussion is common because nothing important is at stake...and I didn't write the full thing because, well, just because.

When I was putting together the current *Cites & Insights* it started at 31 pages and I got it down to a nice, neat 28 pages. And then printed it out so I could look at it a day later and see whether I could catch a few of the typos that seem to haunt every issue. (I did—there are five fewer problems in the final issue than there were at the 28-page level.)

But as I was reading it, I got to one full-page section of **MAKING IT WORK**, sharply critical of a particular initiative (not the results so much as the process). Went past it. And stopped. And went back again. Re-read it. Thought about the people who might take offense, rightly or wrongly. Thought about the importance of my comments in the overall scheme of things (pretty close to zero, fortunately).

And pulled the page. Then found enough other stuff to pull to bring the issue down to 26 pages.

Much as I hate to admit it, I muted my own disagreement—admittedly, on a relatively trivial issue—because right at the moment I didn't want to peeve a few dozen people. I saved the content; it's possible it will emerge in a later issue. It's more likely that it won't, either because the thing I was discussing will be of no current interest—or because I still don't feel ready to “speak truth to power” in this case.

I'm not sure where this is heading. I am sure of this. No matter how long you've worked somewhere, no matter how effective you've been, you can find yourself jobless for a variety of reasons. And if you're jobless or think you might become jobless, you may have a different perspective on the necessity for open disagreement on all issues. That may not be noble, it may not even be right, but it's reality. Particularly for someone who lives from paycheck to paycheck (which is **not** my case at all—there's no pity party going on here—but neither are we independently wealthy: funny how that works for two library people with no significant inherited wealth).

So here it is—and this really is just one badly-written piece of what should be a longer essay on disagreement. Mark, it's a damn shame if people are jumping on for taking an informed stance—and I note that the person you actually disagreed with is **not** one of those jumping on you. Steven B., first we need to have tenured librarians honestly and articulately disagreeing—and I think we need to recognize that, ahem (oh great, here I go getting into trouble again), much of the informed discussion and disagreement on library issues these days takes place in the relatively informal world of liblogs rather than the formal world of scholarly publications and other periodicals.

I'd love to pledge that I would never back off a position because I thought it might hurt me down the road. But to make that pledge would be dishonest. And that's a shame.

I do pledge to say what I mean and mean what I say: If I don't feel I can write honestly and openly about a situation, I'll try to avoid writing about it at all.

Oh, and if you think there's another personal angle to this—well, watch this space on Monday.

Excerpts from comments on that post

- **Dorothea Salo:** Another protective factor can be working in a weird niche of librarianship that nobody actually cares enough about to disagree violently with. I can “speak truth to power” about OA, insofar as I do, because OA

is a small enough, weird enough niche that it'd be hard to put together a posse to shut me up... I learned from my first-job interview process to keep workplace issues off-blog. That, on the whole, I believe was a smart and even healthy choice. I have also learned to moderate my tone somewhat when discussing OA issues, because the [censored] blog keeps getting quoted! I'm still ambivalent about that; my voice in those posts feels less human and less like me, but I also can't deny that the change creates greater reach and more impact for the blog and for me.

- **My response:** You, of course, are part of that growing circle of “people I know I can disagree with.” And OA seems to have an interesting tradition of people being unwilling to be shut up, no matter how hard (cough SH cough) others might insist that they should shut up and go away. I think I've heard of security through obscurity before. Maybe I should try that...or maybe it's a little late.
- **Jennifer Macaulay:** It may be a shame that you can't pledge not to back off of something in order to protect yourself, but I would be willing to bet that there are a good number of us with similar sentiments out there. I tend to be overly concerned about how things that I say might impact my livelihood—and censor myself much more than I would like to admit. Additionally, I'm not a confrontational sort of person. I very rarely argue with people who seem to take it poorly—since it seems to be a waste of time and doesn't produce constructive discourse. There are so many reasons why we so often think twice about what we say and feel compelled to not openly disagree with others. Life teaches hard lessons sometimes. [I responded briefly...]
- **Mark Lindner:** ...I hope that you (and everyone, or at least my friends) know that I am in the same boat as to having to throttle back and even outright avoid some discussions. As you say, “I hate even saying that.” But the truth is the truth. My avoidances generally fall into the 2nd issue, which should be fairly evident since all of my blog “heroes” were due to their allowing me into a “trusted circle” of discourse. But the 3rd wanders into my mind on occasion as I learn to adjust to the “realities” of the world

and (very) soon to be on the market.... Great point on the tenured librarians showing the way. Not necessarily how, but that it might even be allowed, much less accepted as a part of discourse is the important point.

- **Pete Smith:** I'm careful not to directly discuss my present work situation. I have commented on and disagreed with a prominent commentator on UK public libraries, but I can't see that harming me—I don't think he's that sort of person. I don't think my future job prospects would be damaged by disagreement with "prominent" libloggers, US based as many are. Circles always form. If you disagree with one part, you disagree with all, and I've seen that in various online discussions. Also, our times seem to be marked by a weird sort of non-absolute absolutism—those who are not with us totally are totally against us.
- **My response:** Great statement there—something I've talked about but rarely so concisely: "Also, our times seem to be marked by a weird sort of non-absolute absolutism—those who are not with us totally are totally against us." I've run into that time and time again, on topics as diverse as ebooks, the One True Path for Open Access, and copyright—the last from both ends of the spectrum. And, at times, on the Library 2.0/social software area, although less so there as time goes on. In practice, there are lots of powerful and prominent people who I will disagree with openly and without qualms, either because I know them or have a pretty good idea of their character. It's the slightly less prominent, slightly less powerful people who occasionally worry me. There are at least two kinds of circles. The circle that pleases me is the circle of mutual respect that doesn't require mutual agreement—which means it's true mutual respect rather than clique-formation. It's a big circle and one I'll try to keep doing my part to make bigger and even more inclusive.
- **Pete Smith:** I think there are circles that form, break and reform as people negotiate. Then there are those made up of people who fear that if any part of the circle goes, it all goes. Maybe geometry isn't the best source for metaphors. A party is better; groups form, break up, reform—but there's a sense that

we're all at the same party. But some parties are rather more exclusive than others.

I thought that post was a pre-essay. With comments attached, it comes pretty close to being the concluding portion of this essay. Maybe I should leave it at that, but just to reiterate a few points:

- Serious disagreement *does* take place within the library literature, if you include the gray literature of blogs, lists and nonscholarly e-journals like this one. I think you need to include those sources.
- Some forces discourage disagreement, including groupthink, excess civility, open hostility to disagreement—and our natural nervousness about finding or keeping jobs. Given that last, it's only reasonable to suggest that tenured academic librarians should be the first to carry on open, frank discussions that include disagreement: They have less to lose. Yes, I know that's oversimplified: Even tenure doesn't mean you're set for life.
- Some forces explicitly encourage civil disagreement, specifically the "circle of frankness" I see growing within the community of library bloggers. We do our best to separate the argument from the person. We know we can be wrong, and we're willing to hear evidence that we *are* wrong (or, perhaps more frequently, that there's more than one "right"). We may pop off from time to time, but we aim for civility combined with frankness. We are among friends, even though some of us may never actually meet.
- I haven't addressed some issues that Mark Lindner and others were hoping I would address. This essay is too long as it stands, and I suspect eliminating significant portions of the quoted material will reduce context enough to result in *legitimate* claims that I'm quoting out of context. I had to stop somewhere.

Perspective

On Ethics and Transparency

How much do you need to know about who I am and how I deal with issues, people and organizations that might relate to my writing? What do you need to

know about my ethical standards? How much disclosure assures adequate transparency?

I'm moved to write about those issues based on three blog posts and reactions to them. Lawrence Lessig posted "Disclosure statement (ala Joho)" at *lessig blog* (www.lessig.org/blog/) on June 4, 2007—and posted a revised version, "Disclosure statement and statement of principle, 1.1," on June 11, 2007. The first drew a dozen comments; the second (which includes responses to some of those comments), eleven comments as of July 9, 2007. Lessig's post was in turn prompted (partly) by David Weinberger's "Disclosure statement" at *Joho the blog* (www.hyperorg.com/blogger/), most recently updated on February 3, 2007. Sarah Houghton-Jan posted "Accepting vendor perks -or- How unbiased are you?" on June 18, 2007 at *LibrarianInBlack* (librarianinblack.typepad.com); in addition to direct comments on the post, I've read three other posts related to it. Finally, Meredith Farkas posted "The boundaries of disclosure" on July 5, 2007 at *Information wants to be free* (meredith.wolfwater.com/wordpress/) and at least one other blogger commented on that post.

I've written about ethics and blogging before (several times), but I'm not sure any of those essays would do much to inform this discussion. If you're interested, look in *C&I* 3:11, 5:3, 5:7 and 7:6—but you really needn't bother.

Lawrence Lessig

Here's part of Lessig's disclosure statement and statement of principle. I could presumably quote the whole thing—as you would expect from a founder of Creative Commons, the blog operates under a Creative Commons "attribution" (BY) license—but it's close to 2,300 words, and I'd like to keep this essay to no more than 4,000 total. I've reformatted excerpts to conserve space. **Read the whole thing:** It's five times as long as these excerpts and quite an essay.

How I make money: I am a law professor. I am paid to teach and write in fields that interest me...

I also get paid for some of my writing. I write books that are sold commercially... I have been commissioned to write articles for magazines. But in all cases, while I may contract about the subject matter I will address, I never contract about the substance.

I have (though rarely) been paid to consult on matters related to my work. If I have, I conform my behavior to the NC Principle articulated below.

I am sometimes paid to speak. If I am, I will contract as to subject matter (e.g., whether the speech is about innovation, or copyright, or privacy, etc.). I do not con-

tract as to substance. In addition to an honorarium, I also accept payment to cover travel expenses.

I am not compensated for my work with nonprofits.

Tech:...If ever anyone sends me a product to review, I am resolved not to write about it.

Business Attachments: I have no regular clients. I am on board of a number of non-profits... I serve on no commercial boards. I don't take stock-options to serve on boards or advisory boards.

The non-corruption principle: The simple version is just this: I don't shill for anyone. The more precise version is this: I never promote as policy a position that I have been paid to advise about, consult upon, or write about. If payment is made to an institution that might reasonably be said to benefit me indirectly, then I will either follow the same rule, or disclose the payment...

"Corruption" in my view is the subtle pressure to take views or positions because of the financial reward they will bring you. "Subtle" in the sense that one's often not even aware of the influence...

The NC principle is about money. It is not about any other influence. Thus, if you're nice to me, no doubt, I'll be nice to you. If you're respectful, I'll be respectful back. If you flatter me, I doubt I could resist flattering you in return. If you push causes I believe in, I will likely push your work as well...

If you believe I am following my principle, then you can still believe I am biased because I'm a liberal, or wrong because I'm an idiot, or overly attentive because I'm easily flattered, or under-attentive because I punish people who behave badly. All that the NC principle promises is that I am not saying what I am saying because of money.

I may admire Lessig's stance but can't say I'm in the same position. He admits he's in a privileged position—Stanford doesn't expect him to raise money, the law school doesn't require him to teach any particular course or write about any particular subject, he's a tenured professor.

I like this statement: "I may contract about the subject matter, but I never contract about the substance." For my professional speaking and my writing outside work, at least, I'd *like* to make the same assertion, and it's an interesting and important distinction.

When Lessig says, "If ever anyone sends me a product to review, I am resolved not to write about it," I demur *for myself*. For years I reviewed title CD-ROMs; with very few exceptions, those were all sent to me for free. I've been sent books (which are, after all, products) and have reviewed them, not necessarily noting that I received them free. For anything more substantial than a \$30 paperback or \$25 CD-ROM, I believe transparency is essential. If someone offered

me a check for a *favorable* review, I would turn it down (and quite possibly blog about the offer).

I find it interesting that Lessig distinguishes between money and other forms of influence. That may only be realistic. I don't know that it's possible to remain free of *all* influence without becoming a hermit.

Do I subscribe to Lessig's non-corruption principle? No, I don't (and Lessig explicitly says he's not calling on others to follow him). Some commenters raise objections I see as valid—particularly regarding the refusal to espouse a policy that you've been paid to work on. If I agree to work on something I believe in, and am paid for that work, it is appropriate for me to disclose that paid work if I am arguing the merits of that particular thing. I don't believe that, for me and for many others, it **is** appropriate to say "I won't take a position on that, since I've been paid to work on it." To claim that money corrupts at that level is convenient if you're privileged enough to be above it all; most of us are not so privileged.

As to the business attachments—well, nobody's asked me to serve on a board (corporate or other) or offered stock options, so the question hasn't come up. The tiny amount of single stock we purchased in an individual company (Gateway) was basically a waste of money (due to stupidity on my part); all of our other stock, such as it is, is in broad mutual funds.

Lessig sets a high bar for discussing policy—a bar high enough to eliminate many important voices as well as minor comments like me. Sarah Houghton-Jan also sets a high bar in somewhat different directions, albeit with overlap.

Sarah Houghton-Jan

It appears I inspired this post (it begins with my name), and in this case I *am* quoting most of the post, omitting text related to Michael Gorman and whether it's appropriate for him to post at *Britannica blog*:

I believe that the values that one holds as a professional librarian, and also as a writer, depend greatly on objectivity and the ability to keep an even eye on things around us...

If I quit librarianship today I wouldn't blog/write/etc. for a for-profit company that is selling something, particularly something within our field. Why? I have professional values that require objectivity and others in the field know my name, and trust me to give good advice.... There is a certain level of trust that exists once you're in the public eye, and to ignore it, to pretend it's not there, does a disservice to yourself and to your readers/followers/cheerleaders.

I wouldn't eat a lunch provided by a vendor, or take a gift, or anything else. I've never accepted anything from a vendor other than the cheap swag offered at conferences. I do think that accepting anything—money for writing, a lunch in hopes that you'll buy their product, etc.—clouds your judgment... I'd like to believe that we all could keep our objectivity, above all of that schmooze, but I don't think it's possible.

Writing for a publication usually is for something peer-reviewed at some level. You submit something to them in the hopes they'll publish it. If they choose to, you get some dough (maybe). It's different to write for a professional publication (online or in print) than it is to write for the company itself, which is what it is when you're writing for their company blog...

I guess it's this—with publications, authors are the ones starting the association. We submit materials, they choose whether or not to use it, and we get something out of it in the end (maybe). When it's the other way around, the company initiating the association, that's when it gets fuzzy. So...

"If you give us quality material we can use in this professional publication, we might publish it and will give you \$500"... vs. "Here's \$500. Write something for our company's publication."

I think that #2 invites bias...invites ass-kissing...invites jeopardizing one's integrity...

I guess that's my line: if you're doing it for a company (directly) and for money or some other reward, or otherwise gaining some kind of benefit from association with that company, then I do believe you lose your objectivity. Maybe that's a high standard, but it's mine and I'm sticking to it.

I commented, "While I'd like to believe I have fairly strong ethical standards, they're not the same as those outlined here." The three posts I encountered discussing the blog took interesting approaches.

- Steven M. Cohen, whose blog is published by Information Today and who does other work for them, agrees that he *may* have lost his objectivity. "Would I criticize ITI more than, say, ALA or LJ? Of course not. I wouldn't bite the hand that feeds me. Would you? Doubtful."
- Karen Coombs posted "Bias, objectivity and authority" on June 22, 2007 at *Library web chic* (www.librarywebchic.net/wordpress/). She "respectfully disagrees" with Houghton-Jan on "just how objective we really can be." She also relates the discussion back to Lessig's post and notes that most of her writing and speaking is done for cash. More excerpts:

Truthfully I don't think we can be objective. So much of our opinions and judgments are based on experience

and everyone's experience is different so it creates different biases in each of us. Personally, I don't strive for objectivity because I know I won't get there; instead I try to be honest about my biases.

When I deal with vendors I judge them by the quality of their products and the services they provide. One piece of good service is listening to your customers and trying to make improvements based on their feedback. Gathering this feedback results in what Sarah calls schmooze, but I think that this is necessary. I like talking to vendors because it gives me ideas and just because I do business with a vendor doesn't mean I'm not willing to criticize them...

None of us can be truly objective. All we can do is try to and be honest about what our influences and not be afraid to speak our minds.

- Christina Pikas posted "The purpose of vendor interactions" on June 19, 2007 at *Christina's LIS rant* (christinaslibraryrant.blogspot.com). She says "the Librarian in Black has it wrong. I think she misunderstands many (most?) librarian-vendor interactions." Pikas *does* eat their lunches or whatever, asks them pointed questions, tells them her experiences—and talks to small and large vendors alike. Pikas doesn't believe "there is anyone on this earth who is unbiased." Commenting, John Dupuis notes that he not only eats their food, he also serves on some vendor advisory councils—helping make products better while enjoying some perks.
- Houghton-Jan commented on both the Coombs and Pikas post, recognizing others could reasonably disagree but feeling she'd been overinterpreted:

I'm happy to be disagreed with on this, but I think many people are reading more into my post than is actually there. And a lot of people haven't even read the original post, and are just going off of the comments others make. You can certainly talk with a vendor. You have to in order to get stuff. You can certainly write for a journal that pays you. But is the journal telling you to write about a particular topic, perhaps one that shows their sister companies in a favorable light? Or is the vendor buying you dinner and giving you gifts to try to get you to buy their product? This is where I have a problem.

I don't find other posts referring to Houghton-Jan's post, but there may be others who misinterpreted what she was saying. That's irrelevant for my purposes.

I don't disagree with Sarah Houghton-Jan. She's stating her own policy. I don't see how I can disagree with that *as being her policy*. It's not a policy that I follow or one that I would choose to follow if I could start from scratch. Where do I differ?

- I **do** write for for-profit companies. I write a column for *EContent Magazine* (published by Information Today) and used to write a column for *Online Magazine* from the same publisher. I've written a piece for Google (unpaid, unfortunately). There have been cases where an editor suggested possible topics—although never a case where an editor *instructed* me on either the topic or approach I should take.
- I will **certainly** dine on a vendor's dollar—and, frankly, I don't see an ethical distinction between dining with my editor at ALA Editions (part of a nonprofit organization that sells books and other publications to libraries), being fed by OCLC (a nonprofit that sells services to libraries) and being fed by, say, Innovative or ExLibris or SirsiDynix. (Full disclosure: I'm fairly sure SirsiDynix has paid for my drink at some point, and I've certainly attended lavish receptions held by several vendors—receptions that substituted for meals in some cases.) Microsoft sells products and services to libraries, and I was one of several library people who attended MSN Search Champs 4, a two-day event in Redmond where Microsoft paid for lodging and meals and gave us significant gifts, in exchange for a form of free consulting. I don't doubt the ethics of the other library people I know who were there, and they've not been afraid to attack Microsoft. Neither have I.
- Most of my paid writing is not peer-reviewed. To me, true peer review implies possible rejection. In the last few years, I've mostly written columns. While the editor might terminate the column for poor performance, it would be very unusual for an editor to reject a specific column. So, in effect, the publisher is paying me money and saying "Here's \$X: Write something for our publication." Sometimes "something" is specified, at least as to subject (but not treatment). I have no problem with this.
- I believe I would be willing to blog for a company under the right circumstances, but those circumstances would necessarily include editorial freedom—and it would have to be a company I already approved of. Is that shilling? I don't believe so. I'm not saying "I'm Walt Crawford and I want you to buy X's

product.” I’m saying “I’m Walt Crawford and I respect X enough to appear on their blog.” Does that *invite* me to jeopardize my integrity? Perhaps—but I don’t believe it has that effect.

- I’ve done several dozen paid keynotes (and nearly a hundred paid speeches in all) over the years. Many, possibly most of those keynotes have been sponsored by companies: State library conferences and other conferences regularly seek corporate sponsorship for keynoters. Some of the keynotes and speeches have been for vendor-run organizations. In those cases, I knew *exactly* who was paying my way. In other cases, I usually don’t know until I see the program.
- As for personal association, I have a lot of acquaintances and friends in all aspects of the field. For that matter, there’s no firm line between Vendors and Customers—if a friend who works for an academic library goes to work for a vendor, they’re still a friend (and vice-versa). In this case, I doubt Houghton-Jan would disagree. Of course, I’ve *been* a Vendor employee for almost three decades, at least to many librarians: RLG was a nonprofit, but it certainly made most of its revenue by selling products and services to libraries.

Houghton-Jan urges a form of detachment as the basis for objectivity. I prefer to think in terms of transparency—making sure you know about issues that might bias my commentaries. Transparency requires disclosure. How much disclosure? That’s a tricky question.

Meredith Farkas

Farkas posted “The boundaries of disclosure” on July 5, 2007 at *Information wants to be free*. It’s about a different kind of disclosure than that practiced by Lessig. She’s talking about *self*-disclosure—writing about yourself and your work on your blog. It’s an interesting essay, worth reading on its own. Farkas discusses “overdisclosure,” the point at which you’ve said more than is appropriate.

Extreme overdisclosure becomes TMI, too much information, and it can cause a variety of problems. Farkas discusses a case that I’d put in the TMI category, although the blogger in question disagrees. Reading the post section, I was surprised: It seems well over my own limit for what belongs in a public forum. Not that I haven’t seen that in library blogs; there was one librarian blog (pseudonymous) that was

astoundingly and depressingly full of TMI, and finally shut down when the blogger’s self-destructive tendencies reached crisis point.

But it’s rare. Most bloggers, at least most libloggers, manage to maintain a balance between appropriate disclosure and overdisclosure. Farkas (who used to be a therapist) offers an interesting guideline:

There have been times that I’ve wanted to write something I was feeling passionate about, only to stop myself when I realized that my only purpose in writing it was to vent. If I can’t think of how my writing will inform, educate, challenge, make people think, or start a conversation, I won’t publish it. Perhaps this only reflects my thinking on the subject of personal disclosure, but I think it’s probably a good rule of thumb for a blog in which you are representing yourself professionally.

Trying to keep the personal and the professional completely separate doesn’t work very well, as a number of people have said; it particularly falls down in blogging. But there’s personal and then there’s *personal*. One guideline mentioned in a comment bears thinking about: If this isn’t something you’d bring up in a conversation with a total stranger, maybe you shouldn’t be blogging about it.

Where I Stand

I have faith in my own ethical standards. I attempt to operate transparently, to provide full disclosure where I believe there’s any question of possible bias or influence. I may not always succeed in the latter: I’m not about to provide lengthy disclosure statements before each essay or column or book or speech.

As already noted, I’ve been paid to write or speak for commercial enterprises and nonprofits that make money by selling products to libraries. I’ve made most of my living designing and writing software that, directly or indirectly, supports such paid services. I have friends among vendors and among librarians in libraries. I have no qualms about sharing meals with such friends, regardless of who’s paying. I don’t believe it’s difficult to distinguish between normal social occasions and attempts to bribe, but I’ve never really been in a position where someone would *wish* to bribe me.

I generally *avoid* writing in areas where there’s likely to be a perceived conflict of interest with my employer, unless I’m writing as part of my job (and that’s always obvious in the result). So, for example, I don’t write about ebooks now (but might in the future) and I don’t write about online catalogs or cataloging services.

My primary ethical guideline is the Primary Standard: Treat other people at least as well as you would like to have them treat you.

I subscribe to the essential blogging and writing guidelines: I don't tell secrets (or at least I try not to). I don't blog about "private people" by name without their advance permission. I *try* to avoid personal attacks. I'm willing to disagree with the *statements* of people I like and to agree with people I'm less fond of—but I admit that, in a tiny number of cases, I *ignore* people I can't deal with.

Beyond that, I try to maintain some level of fairness (which isn't the same as objectivity) and I try to disclose my biases. I believe in transparency more than I believe in objectivity.

I'm certainly willing to write for pay, unless I smell something wrong with the arrangement. I'm certainly willing to discuss topics for articles or speeches. Would I agree to a situation in which I was told *how* to write, not just what to write about? Generally, no—but under the right circumstances (e.g., for a primary employer where the writing is clearly "work for hire" or for an occasion when it's fully disclosed) I might. Does that make me a shill, real or potential? I don't believe so.

Maybe I haven't said anything here that isn't obvious from my writing—I suspect my biases are painfully transparent. I believe Lessig and Houghton-Jan offered statements worth considering. I also believe people who write or speak should think about these things from time to time—not necessarily to codify your own standards but to see whether you're comfortable with who you are and what you're doing. For now, I am.

Offtopic Perspective

50-Movie Classic Musicals, Part 2

Disc 7

Rock, Rock, Rock. 1956, b&w, Will Price (dir.), Alan Freed, Tuesday Weld, Teddy Randazzo, The Moonglows, Chuck Berry, The Flamingos, Jimmy Cavallo and the House Rockers, the Johnny Burnette Trio, La Vern Baker, Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, Cirino and the Bowties. 1:25.

There's a plot of sorts—Tuesday Weld (age 13, in her first role) needs a prom dress and gets involved in some really bad arithmetic ("one percent of \$1 is \$1") to get it,

but it all works out. Meanwhile, she and a girlfriend, and her square pipe-smoking dad, watch Alan Freed's TV show on which her boyfriend shows up as a singer. He manages to get Freed (remember Alan "Payola" Freed?) to bring the whole shebang to the prom. There's a little more, but it's mostly an excuse for music and lots of it. The disc sleeve's a little off: It claims this is in color, but it was *filmed* in black and white (with no budget, apparently), and it lists Chuck Berry as the star. He does one really great number, but that's it.

The good: Lots of great music of the times, and to Alan Freed's credit he didn't hold with racial boundaries. Chuck Berry's song is "You Can't Catch Me," one of his great car songs. The Moonglows and the Flamingos are wonderful (and do two numbers each, as do most others). Johnny Burnette's rockabilly trio is interesting. Frankie Lymon is a tiny first-rate pro—even if his second number ("I'm Not a Juvenile Delinquent") is, well, strange. Tuesday Weld is charming as a beautiful, innocent, well-meaning but slightly dumb teenager (even if "her" two songs are dubbed by Connie Francis). The square father's strangely amusing.

The not-so-good: One awful female child singer. A few musical acts that could have been replaced with more Berry, Moonglows, Flamingos and Lymon. Mostly, though, the pain of watching Freed clap hands at apparently random intervals (or, in one case, add odd vocal chops to a sax-heavy instrumental) and other cases where the kids (some of whom appear to be in their 30s) clap hands simultaneously—but at intervals that bear no relation to the beat. Strangest case: One where *band members* are clapping to keep time, but one claps on the downbeat while one claps whenever he feels like it.

A cheapie, but with some great music if you can get past Freed and some of the others. As to the IMDB reviews: Most are on the money, but one negative one's absurd—and one other negative one manages to place Chubby Checker in this movie, which is simply wrong. \$1.25.

King Kelly of the USA, 1934, b&w, Leonard Fields (dir.), Guy Robertson, Edgar Kennedy, Irene Ware, Ferdinand Gottschalk, Franklin Pangborn. 1:06.

As a musical, it's sort of a flop, although one piece does get used a lot. The print's dark and damaged, dark enough to be annoying. On the other hand, it's a pretty good comedy, poking fun at "Ruritania"-style monarchies, show biz and efficiency experts. If it weren't for the print, I'd give it more than \$1.00.

Rock 'n' Roll Revue, 1955, b&w, Joseph Kohn (dir.), Nat 'King' Cole, Delta Rhythm Boys, Ruth Brown, Willie Bryant, Duke Ellington, Lionel Hampton, Dinah Washington, Joe Turner, The Clovers. 0:37.

The two movies on side B—the two "Revue"—are pretty much the same thing, which in these cases is high praise. Combined, these appear to be three episodes of a (TV?) show set in the same Harlem theater, with the

same host (Willie Bryant) and an incredible variety of music with dance and comedy thrown in. Both cast lists here are incomplete (Bryant pushes the acts through one after another). Don't expect "Rock 'n' Roll" but it's quite a revue nonetheless. The sleeve reverses the timing for this and the next one. The print isn't great and the sound is occasionally distorted—but it's still worth \$1, even for what's basically a half-hour short subject. \$1.

Rhythm and Blues Revue, 1955, b&w, Joseph Kohn and Leonard Reed (dir.), Lionel Hampton, The Larks, Sarah Vaughan, Bill Bailey, Count Basie, Joe Turner, Delta Rhythm Boys, Cab Calloway, Nat 'King' Cole, Nipsey Russell, Amos Milburn. 1:11

Same setting, same host, but this is two episodes put together (there's an obvious cut and Bryant welcomes us again halfway through). More music, including Joe Turner's version of *Shake, Rattle and Roll* and Cab Calloway's astonishing *Minnie the Moocher*. Great stuff throughout, marred only by serious visual damage to much of the print—but the soundtrack's OK, and that's what matters. \$1.75.

Disc 8

A quick note about some IMDB reviews, particularly of the second and third movies: I don't know how to write down a razzberry, but that and some unprintable language constitute my comment. And calling *Hi-De-Ho* a "race film," while possibly accurate in terms of original distribution, says more about the commenter than it does about the universal talent of Cab Calloway and his band.

Till the Clouds Roll By, 1946, Color, Richard Whorf (dir.), June Allyson, Judy Garland, Van Heflin, Lena Horne, Van Johnson, Dinah Shore, Frank Sinatra, Gower Champion, Cyd Charisse, Angela Lansbury. 2:15

[Note: This movie was also in *Family Classics Movie Pack*. I did not re-review it except to check for picture and sound quality. This is the review from the early viewing, unchanged except to change "\$4" to "\$2" in light of changing DVD prices.] Astonishingly, MGM failed to renew copyright on this biopic of Jerome Kern, so it's in the public domain. The bio part is so-so, but the musical numbers are great and the print nearly flawless. (I was seeing occasional flaws, then realized that they occurred at regular intervals in the upper right hand corner: They're reel-change flags, not flaws.) The picture is good enough that I tried it on our big TV to verify quality, which turns out to be VHS quality: Soft for a DVD, and the Pause key shows the difference, but still remarkable for \$0.60. And what a lineup of stars, all singing Jerome Kern's music. \$2, easy.

All-American Co-Ed, 1941, b&w, LeRoy Prinz (dir.), Frances Langford, Johnny Downs, Marjorie

Woodworth, Noah Beery Jr., Harry Langdon, Alan Hale Jr. 0:53 [0:48].

It's short for a feature but it's a charming musical comedy beginning with a drag song-and-dance number (with frat boys from "Quinceton") and continuing through a simple but well-done plot with enough humor and plenty of music. The print is excellent. Nominated for two Oscars. It's a Hal Roach film, and I think it's a keeper. \$2.

Hi-De-Ho, 1947, b&w, Josh Binney (dir.), Cab Calloway, Ida James, The Millers. 1:12 [1:03].

Let's get the bad parts out of the way first. The plot is minor at best. The acting in the plot portion of the movie isn't wonderful. One song that does *not* appear is *Minnie the Moocher* (but there's one heck of a *Saint James Infirmary*). The print, while very good, is not entirely flawless (and apparently missing nine minutes). Then there's the good news: The plot doesn't matter, since the bulk of the movie is head-on numbers by Cab Calloway and his remarkable band—although the band isn't as remarkable as Calloway himself. There are a few other numbers (great tapdancing by the Millers, one or two songs by an unremarkable trio), but mostly there's a *lot* of Cab Calloway, and I can't see asking for much more. What an entertainer! Singing, moving, getting down, scatting... One good Cab Calloway number is worth a quarter extra in almost any film—as with Nat King Cole, Lionel Hampton and Count Basie. A film that's almost entirely Cab Calloway and band—well, I'm torn between \$2 and \$2.25. (Hey, with *Minnie the Moocher* it might get the maximum \$2.50.)

Breakfast in Hollywood, 1946, b&w, Harold D. Schuster (dir.), Tom Breneman, Bonita Granville, Billie Burke, Ray Walburn, Zasu Pitts, Hedda Hopper, Spike Jones, Nat 'King' Cole. 1:30 [1:27].

The weakest flick on this disc, but that says more about the strength of the first three. "Breakfast in Hollywood" was Tom Breneman's radio show at his Hollywood restaurant; portions of a supposed episode of the show (and dinnertime entertainment at the restaurant) form the heart of the movie and pretty much all the music. The main plot involves a girl out from Minneapolis on a bus to meet her fiancé, just out of the armed forces—but he's not there and she runs into another just-released kid at the show, from the same city. Turns out her fiancé got married. The kid falls head over heels for her. She leaves to go back home. Breneman gets involved. There are secondary plots involving Hedda Hopper's silly hats and a woman who really wants to have the oddest hat at the show because Breneman tries one on and kisses the woman wearing it. There's more, of course. Well played. Spike Jones, Nat 'King' Cole, and some vocalist each get two numbers; it's great to see Spike Jones in action, and one of Cole's numbers is an absolutely first-rate blues piece. The negatives: The print's not in great shape, with

damage to the picture and sometimes the sound. Even with damage, this comes in at \$1.50.

Disc 9

Side A of this disc contains *Soundies Festival* and *Soundies Cavalcade*. Those titles are artificial, appearing only on the sleeve and as menu slides to cover the six “soundies” included—six brief musical shorts, all featuring black performers.

Mr. Adam's Bomb, 1949, b&w, Eddie Green (dir.), Gene Ware, Jessie Grayson, Mildred Boyd. 0:20.

Silly but cute comedy, not much more than a sketch. Not much to say. I'll give it \$0.25.

Bubbling Over, 1934, b&w, Leigh Jason (dir.), Ethel Waters, Southernaires, Hamtree Harrington, Frank L. Wilson. 0:20?

Another sketch, although fairly well developed for its brief length. Scratchy video and sound. \$0.25.

Open the Door, Richard and *Answer to Open the Door, Richard*, 1945. William Forest Crouch (dir.), Dusty Fletcher, Stepin Fetchit. 0:09 + 0:10

The last short in *Soundies Festival* is *Open the Door, Richard*—a remarkable 9-minute drunk-act monologue by Dusty Fletcher. But in IMDB, that title yields what's here (as the first short in *Soundies Cavalcade*) as *Answer to Open the Door, Richard*, here two minutes shorter than the IMDB summary. This one's an extended music piece with a jazz group and back-and-forth between Dusty Fletcher (the drunk on the sidewalk) and Stepin Fetchit (Richard, not all that chipper himself but just married and *not about to open that door*). The second part's seriously choppy, but I'll give the combination \$0.50.

Murder in Swing Town, 1937, b&w, Arthur Dreifuss (dir.), Les Hite and his orchestra. 0:10.

This one isn't even in IMDB—not surprisingly. It's basically two musical numbers with a vague semblance of a plot mixed in. Choppiness doesn't help. \$0.25.

Boogie-Woogie Dream, 1944, b&w, Hans Burger (dir.), Lena Horne, Albert Ammons, Pete Johnson, Teddy Wilson and his band. 0:13.

Definitely the highlight of this side. The plot, such as it is, has a posh couple falling asleep at a nightclub as it closes—and the dishwasher (Lena Horne) fantasizes with a couple of other cleanup folks (Ammons, Johnson) about singing and playing with Teddy Wilson. Mostly music, and great music at that. For a change, the video and sound are pretty good. This one gets \$0.75—which for 13 minutes isn't bad.

Reaching for the Moon, 1930, b&w, Edmund Goulding (dir.), Douglas Fairbanks, Bebe Daniels, Edward Everett Horton, Bing Crosby. 1:14 or 1:06 [1:06]

This *should* be a screwball musical comedy based on Irving Berlin's musical—except that in this version, only

one song remains, more than 44 minutes into the movie. So it really isn't a musical—but it's loads of fun, with the senior Douglas Fairbanks acquitting himself as a swashbuckling investor (just before the crash) who doesn't deal with ladies very well. Mostly set on a cruise ship. Art deco lettering throughout—in the hotels, on Wall Street, on the ship—adds an odd air, but this isn't meant to be taken seriously in any case. I believe Bing Crosby does one verse of the one song, but he's good while he's there. \$1.25.

Mr. Imperium, 1951, color, Don Hartman (dir.), Lana Turner, Ezio Pinza, Marjorie Main, Barry Sullivan, Sir Cedric Hardwicke, Debbie Reynolds. 1:27.

This is more like it: most definitely a musical (although Debbie Reynolds—18 at the time—doesn't sing, and Lana Turner's songs are dubbed by another singer) and a romance. Turner's a singer, later a movie star; Pinza's a crown prince, later king. They meet, fall in love, are separated for 12 years, meet again (this time in California), fall in love again—and are separated again, but we assume it will all work out. Not great, but good (although the heat between Pinza and Turner is room temperature at best), and both color and sound are quite good. \$1.50.

Disc 10

Royal Wedding, 1951, color, Stanley Donen (dir.), Fred Astaire, Jane Powell, Peter Lawford, Sarah Churchill, Keenan Wynn. 1:33.

[Note: This movie was also in the Family Classics megapack and the review that follows is from that copy. The movie is such a treat that I watched part of it again; the color and sound are both fine.] Fred Astaire dancing on the walls, on the ceiling, and on a cruise ship dance floor in heavy seas—with Jane Powell, who's very good. Excellent print through most of the movie (with slight damage in a few minutes), and a wonderful movie—not much of a plot (and Peter Lawford didn't exactly set the screen on fire with his thespian abilities), but great dancing, fine singing, and just plain charming. Technicolor, generally vivid color. \$2.00

The Pied Pier of Hamelin, 1957, color, Bretagne Windust (dir.), Van Johnson, Claude Rains, Jim Backus, Kay Starr, Doodles Weaver. 1:29 [1:27]

[Also in the Family Classics megapack and not newly reviewed.] Made for TV? While the print's generally very good, there are quite a few gaps—more disturbing than usual since this is a musical. Van Johnson has two roles (one of them the Pied Piper). The conceit here is that the music is all by Grieg. The problem here is that it's a lackluster picture. OK, but no more than that. \$0.75.

Wild Guitar, 1962, b&w, Ray Dennis Teckler (dir.), Arch Hall Jr., Nancy Czar, Arch Hall Sr., Ray Dennis Steckler. 1:32 [1:29].

Remember *Eegah?* (*C&I* 6:12, October 2006) It was a thoroughly lame “scifi” movie slightly redeemed by Rich-

ard Kiel (Jaws in *Moonraker*) as the slightly pre-human title character. It was considerably less redeemed by an untalented and not wildly attractive teenager who tended to break out in song at various intervals, mostly sappy ballads. That teenager was Arch Hall Jr., and the director (and, I believe, producer) was his father, Arch Hall Sr., who also acted in the film. So here we have the same father-son team (although Hall Sr. found a different director), the same mediocre ballads—one of them *literally* the same—and a picture about corrupt music managers that might have promise if it wasn't such dreck. Arch Hall Jr. plays a kid who blows into LA from South Dakota with a guitar and \$0.15—and immediately Makes It Big, albeit with a crooked promoter (his father) and the promoter's gunslinging evil sidekick (played by the director). Nancy Czar is, of course, the beauty who falls for him despite silly obstacles (she's a fine ice skater, based on one of the film's better sequences). There are also a trio of would-be crooks who make the Three Stooges look like Ivy Leaguers. "Wild" is about as far from this kid's guitar stylings as you can get: He's all swoony moony June. Amusing dreck—but still dreck. \$1.00.

Murder with Music, 1941, b&w, George P. Quigley (dir.), Nellie Hill, Bob Howard, Noble Sissle & orchestra. 0:59 [0:57].

A bunch of good music from little-heard musical groups—and a plot that doesn't make a whole lot of sense. It's another all-black movie (Nellie Hill was also in *Killer Diller*, reviewed in *C&I* 7.5, in a smaller role). Unfortunately, the first half is choppy—those missing two minutes seem to be a half-second at a time, through enough musical and plot sections to make viewing difficult. Too bad; the second half's better and the music (and one dance number) is excellent. Even with those flaws, it's worth \$1.00.

Disc 11

Jack and the Beanstalk, 1952, color and sepia, Jean Yarbrough (dir.), Bud Abbott, Lou Costello, Buddy Baer. 1:10. [1:21]

[Also in Family Classics pack, not rereviewed.] I'm not sure why IMDB lists this as 11 minutes *shorter* than the running time on the DVD, but an Argentine release was apparently somewhere in the middle. This was another pleasant surprise. The surround, in sepia, has Abbott and Costello trying to babysit a rotten kid. The middle, in color, is the book Costello reads to him—or, rather, has the kid read to Costello. It's a vivid retelling with songs added (which don't help), with Costello as Jack and Abbott as the greedy butcher (who also climbs up to the castle). Not a laugh a minute, but well done. The print's good but the sound is a little harsh sometimes. As for the acting, it's fine—except for the Handsome Prince, who—when supposedly courting the Beautiful Princess (both assuming the roles of commoners, both held by the Giant)—seems to be looking over her shoulder ei-

ther in a mirror or at his boyfriend. All in all, though, pretty good. \$1.50

The Road to Hollywood, 1946, b&w, Bud Pollard (dir.), Bing Crosby, Bud Pollard (narrator). 0:56 [0:53]

[Also in Family Classics pack, not rereviewed.] Bud Pollard, an exploitation director, came up with a stunt to make some quick bucks. He uncovered three comedy shorts made by Danny Kaye for Mack Sennett; when Danny Kaye hit it big in the movies, Pollard stitched footage from the three into a movie he called *Birth of a Star*—a perfect second feature for theaters that could advertise a big-name star. So Pollard did the same again, this time stitching together excerpts from four Mack Sennett two-reelers starring Bing Crosby, made in 1931 and 1932, with lots of Pollard narration and laudatory comments. The whole thing is just a different form of exploitation. The four short musical comedies on their own might be interesting; the composite is a mess. The print's only so-so. \$0.50

The Big Show, 1936, b&w, Mack V. Wright (dir.), Gene Autry, Smiley Burnette, Kay Hughes, Sally Payne, William Newell, Max Terhune, Sons of the Pioneers, the Jones Boys, the Beverly Hillbillies, the Light Crust Doughboys, Champion, Rex King. 1:10/0:54. [0:55]

The plot: Tom Ford's making a movie with Gene Autry as his stuntman. Ford goes on vacation (and to hide out from \$10,000 gambling debts) and the studio publicist says he's needed at the Texas World's Fair in Dallas (where most of this was filmed). Solution? Have Gene Autry don a fake mustache and impersonate Tom Ford. But Ford doesn't sing—and that's Autry's big thing. Lots of music, lots of action with the gangster (who decides to blackmail the studio about the Autry-as-Ford thing, which doesn't work well because the studio *loves* having a singing cowboy). Autry wasn't that hot as an actor at the time, but since he was also playing Ford, he acted as well as Ford. More show biz than western, but plenty of music—and the Beverly Hillbillies were a western singing group a long time before it was a TV show. \$1.50.

Black Tights (orig. *1-2-3-4 ou Les Collants noirs*), 1960, color, Terence Young (dir.), Maurice Chevalier, Zizi Jeanmaire, Cyd Charisse, Roland Petit, Moira Shearer, Ballets de Paris of Roland Petit. 2:20/2:05 [2:03]

This one's odd and tough to evaluate. It's four dance performances—*The Diamond Crusher*, *Cyrano de Bergerac*, *A Merry Mourning* and *Carmen*—with Maurice Chevalier introducing them and providing some English narration. I have no idea how good the dances are (the costumes are fine and done by name designers), although they seemed enjoyable enough. I'd guess this isn't world-class choreography. The print's OK (not great), the sound's OK as well. The big problem: This is a widescreen film, using "curtains" of sorts as black bars. It's mediocre VHS quality. That means there just isn't much picture detail to work with—maybe 2/3 of VHS' 230 lines, if that. As a

result, wide shots involving more than two people are so soft as to be uninteresting. A true DVD version (using all 480 lines of DVD, with anamorphic conversion for the widescreen) might or might not be more interesting. As it is, I'm almost reluctant to say \$1.25.

Disc 12

Fiesta, 1941, color, LeRoy Prinz (dir.), Anne Ayars, Jorge Negrete, Armida, George Givot, Antonio Moreno, The Guadalajara Trio, José Arias and the Tipica Orchestra of the Mexico City Police. 0:45.

Remember *The Dancing Pirate* (C&I 7:5, May 2007), filmed in color but only available in black and white? I said I'd love to see that one in color. Well, this somewhat similar (albeit much shorter and less complex) film, also set in a Mexican rancho and with good folkloric dancing, is in color—and spectacular original Technicolor at that, more colorful than most later movies. The plot is simple enough—the rancho owner's niece is returning from Mexico City and her childhood sweetheart expects they'll be married, but she shows up with a bozo hunk of a radio actor who she's engaged to...anyway, it all works out. Almost all of the movie is music, singing and dance, all well done, in simply spectacular costumes and color. The print is in excellent shape; it almost seemed to be DVD quality. Truly a small gem. \$1.50 only because it's too short for \$2 or more.

Let's Go Collegiate, 1941, b&w, Jean Yarbrough (dir.), Frankie Darro, Marcia May Jones, Jackie Moran, Keye Luke, Mantan Moreland, Gale Storm. 1:02

Silly college-fraternity plot based on rowing and a crook passing for a new oarsman. Not many songs, but the ones here are good. Very early Gale Storm (she was 19 at the time), and she does stand out. \$1.

Up in the Air, 1940, b&w, Howard Bretherton (dir.), Frankie Darro, Marjorie Reynolds, Mantan Moreland, Gordon Jones, Lorna Gray, Tristram Coffin. 1:02.

Apparently Darro and Moreland made a number of buddy pictures. In this case, they both work at a radio station where a mediocre singer gets shot (as, later, do a couple of others) and Darro tries to solve the crime and get on the air. Lightweight comedy, but not bad. \$0.75.

Minstrel Man, 1944, b&w, Joseph H. Lewis (dir.), Benny Fields, Gladys George, Alan Dinehart, Roscoe Karns, Jerome Cowan, Judy Clark, John Raitt (as himself). 1:10 [1:03].

Two Oscar nominations, for best scoring and best original song ("Remember Me to Carolina"), and apparently based on a real character's success, fall from grace (after his wife dies in childbirth) and eventual redemption. Fields as Dixie Boy Johnson is less than magnetic on the screen and has an odd singing style that you may love or hate. Lots of music, to be sure, much of it very good. Whether you like this movie or not may depend on your tolerance for blackface: Fields and, later, Judy Clark as

his daughter (Dixie Girl Johnson on stage), both white, both use classic blackface for their minstrel-show roles. I find that too unsettling (especially in 1944) to give the film more than \$1.00.

Rhythm in the Clouds, 1937, b&w, John H. Auer (dir.), Patricia Ellis, Warren Hull, William Newell. 0:53.

Nicely done, with more than enough plot for its modest length. An aspiring songwriter cons her way into the apartment of a successful writer who's out of town, sells her songs as being cowritten with the missing artist and manages to pull things together when he returns. Good music, nicely paced, a good "second film." \$1.25.

Sitting on the Moon, 1936, b&w, Ralph Staub (dir.), Roger Pryor, Grace Bradley, William Newell, Henry Kolker. 0:54.

William Newell, a nervous sidekick in the previous flick, is also a sidekick this time—as a lyricist to Danny West, who falls for a failing movie star, writes her a song, makes her a success on radio but in the process winds up failing himself (aided by a bogus Mexican marriage while he was drunk). Naturally it all works out. Enough good music to make it work, but enough missing frames in the print to make it awkward. \$0.75.

Summing Up

There are some winners here: *Rhythm and Blues Revue*, *Till the Clouds Roll By*, *All-American Co-Ed*, the wonderful *Hi-De-Ho*, *Royal Wedding*.

I calculated \$30.50 for the first half. That makes the total \$63.75 for the set as a whole, with at least eighteen movies that bear watching again. That sounds about right. At \$16 or so, it's a bargain, for the rare flicks and for the just plain good ones.

Masthead

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