Preface

The Value of Telling the Future

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The untruth of untrue stories can sometimes be helpful in the real world.
—Salman Rushdie, The Enchantress of Florence

An invitation to write essays on the future of academic libraries is inevitably a double-edged opportunity. On the one hand, it seems to beckon the author to be bold and assert with confidence what the future will hold. On the other hand, prudence directs that such an invitation should be approached with deep humility, recognizing that these predictions likely will share in the fate of most prognostication by being wrong. Whatever we say in these pages, the future is overwhelmingly likely to surprise us.

But if humility is called for, paralysis is not. As Salman Rushdie reminds us, even untruth can have its uses, and so we must remember that even incorrect predictions about the future can be productively wrong. So the task of ruminating on the future of the academic library is worth doing if we understand the task correctly.

It seems to me that there are two ways in which predictions can be productive even when they turn out to miss the mark of correctly describing the future. First, they can help us be prepared for how that future does turn out. Second, they are part of the way in which we actively shape the world that will come. Even when we encounter predictions with which we disagree, profoundly or mildly, we engage in an active effort of evaluation and (re)consideration that serves both of these ends.
Predictions help us prepare simply by making us aware that the future will be different. By now, we must have learned in the world of academic libraries that many things have changed and will continue to change. Thinking about what might be, simply makes us more able to adapt, as the future unfolds, to what actually is.

One entirely unproductive way in which academic librarians occasionally react to change is with fear and denial. Here, too, the untruth of untrue predictions can help us fashion a more productive response. Suppose we acknowledge, as I am trying to do, that the future will present us with unknown and unknowable surprises. Should we just wait and see what those surprises are, or should we take steps to manage them? Can we, through our ruminations on the future, have a hand in shaping that future, even if we cannot wholly control it? Of course we can! When we predict, we usually also prepare; we begin to take actions toward accommodating the future we foresee. And those actions have the effect of making our predictions a bit more likely to be right, or, to say it another way, of shaping the future more in the direction of our imaginings.

The future seems frightening to many of us. It is easy to imagine developments that would be unpleasant. But the best way to avoid an unpleasant future is to try to take control of its unfolding. If we are frightened by what commercial publishers might do as digital resources continue to dominate the marketplace, one way to address our concern is to begin creating new resources in-house, through library publishing programs.¹ If we think that Google and other online information sources are making students less focused and capable of sustained and systematic research, we can enhance our information literacy programs by working with teaching faculty to craft assignments that counter that trend.² The point is that libraries should—must—play a more active role in shaping their own future than they have ever had to do before. The essays in these volumes grow out of an awareness of the diverse forces, coming from a variety of directions and sources, that will have an impact on the academic library in the 21st century, and they represent efforts to give us the awareness and some of the tools that will be needed to harness, adapt, or counter those forces.

So as I join the other authors in these books by offering my own very general sketch of what I think the future of academic libraries might look like, I take my motto from the 16th-century reformer Martin Luther, who advised his followers to “sin boldly.” For Luther this admonition was intended to counter the idea that human beings must or could achieve perfection in their mortal lifetimes, and to encourage dependence on divine grace.³ For me the point is that we should make our predictions boldly, and even make changes in our practice based on them, relying on our own ability to shape the very future about which we are nevertheless quite likely to be mistaken.
WHAT PROBABLY WON’T CHANGE

In the remainder of this introduction, and also in the spirit of bold humility that I have outlined above, I want to begin to outline some of the broad areas and the particular directions in which I think the academic library at the end of the 21st century is likely to differ from the academic library of today. But I recognize, too, that we live in an era where we are bombarded with messages of change. So before I add to that cacophony of predictions about upheaval, it seems worthwhile to mention that some of the areas in which really dire predictions are often made probably will not actually suffer such dramatic alteration.

For example, we sometimes hear that the library of the 21st century—the library in the fully digital age—will be a library without walls. In contradiction to this opinion, I believe that academic libraries will retain their importance as places and spaces.

As with most library functions, the importance of the library as place will likely be for different reasons. Instead of a space where large-print collections are shelved and individual scholars study quietly, academic libraries will retain their importance as places where collaborative work is done, where events are held, and where materials—both from the collection and from elsewhere—are exhibited. In short, people will use our library spaces in new ways, and often ways that are disturbing to more traditional notions of the “hushed and shushed” library, but they will continue to come in through our doors.

As part of a talk about librarian expertise given recently at the Duke University Libraries, Jim Neal, who is vice president for information services and university librarian at Columbia University, expressed both the ongoing importance of the library as a physical space and the changes to the role of that space when he said that “academic library staff must be able to rethink, repurpose, redirect and radicalize the use of library space, advancing new conceptions and applications, and establishing guidelines for planning and design.”

On academic campuses the library has such a central place, historically, physically, and socially, that it is not only likely that librarians will have to make these adjustments but absolutely necessary. The physical space will continue to be important to our students especially, albeit in different ways, and our task will be to explain this ongoing centrality to our administrators.

Another dire fear for many librarians is that books as we know them will cease to have a role in libraries. Many of us are in our profession because we are bibliophiles, and the shrill media reports about libraries without books are painful to us. But the history of technology is that old media coexist with newer developments. Plato predicted that writing would undermine human memory, and John Philip Sousa feared that new recording techniques
would make singing obsolete. The movie industry decided in the 1970s that they must stop the development of the VCR in order to preserve filmmaking, an effort replete with irony now that home video sales have become such an important part of the revenue for the industry. In a similar way, we should expect that printed and digital books will both be important to library patrons in the 21st century. The need for print books will likely vary depending on the nature of the library and the needs of its clientele; digital media will dominate in some libraries, while print will be extremely important in others. For academic libraries, with their balance between meeting immediate research needs and preserving human knowledge for future researchers, there will continue to be a needed balance between printed materials and those accessible online.

Parallel to this idea that libraries will need multimedia resources for the foreseeable future is the ongoing need for professional selection and acquisitions. It simply is not the case, and likely never will be, that everything our researchers need is on the Web and freely accessible. We will continue to acquire print resources, albeit more selectively, and to purchase access to online resources. Even as libraries work to make more materials openly accessible to the world, we will need the skill and judgment of our selectors and acquisitions librarians, not least to help us manage how we will use our funds to support such open collections, in addition to more traditional acquisitions. Because the types of materials will both change across the board and change differently in the various disciplines—for example some disciplines will continue to depend on long-form argumentation more than others—expert selectors will be important into this future we are imagining.

Finally, it is worth noting that digital communications do not presage an end to reading. An adolescent with her eyes glued to her mobile device for hours at a time is doing more reading, not less, than many of her counterparts from twenty years ago. A great deal more communication between peers happens via text and requires reading. It is true that reading these textual communications and other materials on the Internet is different than the more focused and linear reading process that books require. But if the dawn of television did not put an end to reading, as some feared that it would, the digital environment not only will not do so, it will diversify the media through which communications occur and keep reading (and writing) a vital part of the social and educational process. Academic libraries will have a vital role in supporting these processes and in helping our students adapt to the several different styles of study and communication with which they will need fluency.
From the assertions I have just made about what is not going to change, or at least not go away, in academic libraries, it probably follows that I see more continuity in the 21st-century academic library than is predicted by many popular news articles and op-ed pieces. But I still believe that we are facing significant changes, and that there are steps we should be taking to prepare for those changes. These steps, I hope, are the places where I have the opportunity to be productively wrong in my own predictions about the future.

I want to focus my suggestions about the changes we need to prepare for in academic libraries in the 21st century on three areas: preservation, access and research, and service reconfiguration. I also feel I should apologize for the frequency in which references to copyright and the need to navigate the increasingly ill-fitting system of copyright law will occur as I talk about these changes. I am a copyright lawyer in addition to being a librarian, and there is truth to the old saying that for a man with a hammer everything looks like a nail.

Preservation is a long-standing responsibility for academic libraries, but in the digital age it will become even more important, much broader in scope, and very complex. In a print-only world, preservation has meant intensive intervention in only a relatively few special cases, where material was both rare and deteriorating. For the majority of our print collections, preservation was passive, requiring attention to maintaining an appropriate environment for the books and journals, but not individual attentions to the majority of items. One reason we could take this approach was that most of what is in our general print collections are works of general availability, which are owned by many libraries worldwide.

In regard to digital scholarship, however, the situation is quite different. More and more of the scholarly works we will be dealing with in academic libraries will be born digital, locally created, and existing in a wide variety of formats. All this in addition to the commercial digital products we will continue to acquire, which themselves have more diverse and complicated preservation needs.

Paper has been a very stable medium over long periods of time. For all its advantages in other ways, digital media are much more fragile; they deteriorate more quickly, and the formats in which they exist become obsolete at an alarming rate. All of this means that academic libraries will have a much greater role in preserving digital. At least six new roles for academic libraries and their staff seem necessary, acknowledging that this is not my field of expertise and that there are likely to be new roles I am unaware of:
• Advising faculty about digital scholarly projects in order to direct them toward formats and techniques that will improve the longevity of those projects. For faculty writing books and journal articles, it has never been necessary to consider preservation issues at the creation stage, but for digital scholarship it is. Librarians will need to take a leadership role in seeing that this happens.

• Developing or locating technical expertise, which may or may not reside in the library, will be necessary to put in place monitor processes that periodically verify the integrity of digital assets.

• Reformating for continued access will be a growing activity for libraries that host locally produced digital scholarship. Indeed, the hosting itself will be a new function that academic libraries are and will continue to be called on to provide.

• Attending to and advocating for efforts to reform the copyright law as it related to library preservation activities is needed. The law as written in 1976 provides for limited copying and distribution to accomplish preservation of print and audiovisual resources. It has worked reasonably well for four decades, but is severely challenged in the digital environment. While reform is probably needed to facilitate digital preservation, such reform will be contested and could make the situation worse rather than better for libraries, so vigilance is called for. Libraries need to develop expertise in this area and be willing to exercise their influence and authority.

• On our own campuses, combining policies related to preservation, including moving to assume the role of “trusted repositories,” with education efforts to help our constituents understand the challenges of preservation, including assuring long-term access, for digital scholarship.

• Incorporating preservation as part of the process of acquiring digital resources from commercial vendors and other third parties, as an aspect of the licensing negotiations.

Even with this short and undoubtedly incomplete list, it should be obvious that what is most likely to change the world of academic libraries is the creation of born-digital scholarly projects by our faculty. Preservation, and the need to help faculty authors think about issues of preservation and access at the beginning of the creative process, is only one of several ways in which local digital scholarship will change the business of academic libraries. To look at these changes in more detail, we turn to the second broad area of thinking about the future that I suggested.
Access and the research process encompass a great deal of the services that libraries provide, but I want to focus my discussion on one significant change that I expect us to see in this area in the decades ahead. Ironically, in an age of instantaneous global communication, I expect that libraries will become more local in their focus.

Of course, the ability to communicate globally is part of the reason we are both free to focus on local resources and issues and obligated to do so. As the Internet offers all types of scholars the opportunity to make their works available to the world, the role of libraries in buying as many commercially available resources as we can, redundantly with many other academic libraries, will be greatly reduced in importance. We are likely to rely much more than we do now on point-of-need purchases and fees for individual access, as well as on open resources of all kinds. In that environment, what will be most important for academic libraries will be to make our own contribution to the digital environment for scholarship. That is, we will spend more time curating and digitizing local, unique collections and assisting with digital scholarship projects developing on our own campuses.

The idea that libraries should and will focus more on local collections of material that is not available from mass-market distributors has attracted some attention recently. One focus of that attention was a report written for Ithaka S+R by University of Utah librarian Rick Anderson called “Can’t Buy Us Love: The Declining Importance of Library Books and the Rising Importance of Special Collections.” Anderson’s basic argument, that “the library’s role as a broker, curator, and organizer of commodity documents is fading,” seems correct to me, as does his suggestion that libraries should place more emphasis on curating and sharing unique local resources, the parts of our collections we currently call “special.” His distinction between commodity and non-commodity documents seems too rigid, however, and its use to suggest that we should stop advocating for more open resources (“opting out of the scholarly communications wars,” as he says) misguided. Part of this emphasis on local resources must include the transition of more of the scholarship created on our campus to the status of non-commodity documents. That is, in addition to improving the ecosystem of scholarship by making new, previously unavailable resource usable through digitization projects, we should also continue to advocate for open access with the same purpose in mind. By reducing the overall dependence of scholarship on commodity documents, we are helping to create a more sustainable environment for research and teaching.

Open access is an important part of the way access and research processes will change for academic libraries in the 21st century. Libraries are already providing extensive support for open access through institutional repositories, funding to support article processing fees for those open-access publications that use that business model, and even hosting of open-access journals,
monographs, and educational resources. This is clearly a growth industry, and an important part of the shift of focus in academic libraries from being brokers of commercial products to producers of locally based scholarly resources. Among other things that open access will alter is the way we deal with copyright issues and how we advise faculty on these matters. Just as librarians will shift from consumption to production, generally speaking, they will also, in an open-access era, shift from advising faculty on how to use copyright material owned by others toward advising on how to manage copyrights owned by the faculty creators in order to best serve the interests of those creators and the scholarly community. Needless to say, this shift will also impact how researchers work to find resources and how librarians help them in that process. Finally, the move toward open access means that pretty radical realignment in how we spend our money in academic libraries is not too far off; we will talk more about this under service reconfiguration.

So far I have focused on two ways in which library services will move toward more local production instead of the acquisition of commodity materials. This shift also indicates a new way to envision the role of the individual librarian. Broadly speaking, the role of the professional librarian in the past has involved the application of specialized knowledge to relatively consistent and routine situations. Cataloging a book requires some real expertise, but its application, while depending on the specific bibliographic information, is pretty structured. Even a traditional reference encounter moves along relatively routinized lines, for the most part. But as we are called upon to assist in the creation of new knowledge through involvement in all kinds of digital scholarship projects, our roles will evolve, I believe, toward more of a consultancy model.

Although there are many definitions of professionalism, it is interesting to note that the idea of the professional as a consultant—someone who brings specialized knowledge to bear on the specific and individual situation of the client, within some shared understanding of the boundaries of the relationship—is common, if implicit, in mbst. As library work focuses more on consulting with knowledge creators about the appropriate ways to design, describe, disseminate, and preserve the scholarly works they are building, my hope is that the professionalism of librarianship will be more readily acknowledged. Each of these projects will be different, and each will involve the creation of a team, including librarians, that may never have worked together before. The points at which intervention is needed will vary; some faculty will know what platform they should use, but not how the output format should be preserved. Some will need advice about licensing so that others make proper use and acknowledgment of the resource. Still others will require help creating metadata so that its intended users can easily find the
resource. All of these are properly the scope of librarians, but this shifting way in which they are applied—the librarian as consulting knowledge manager—will undergo constant modification.

To return once more to my idée fixe, copyright is a field in which the librarian as knowledge consultant will need to offer some degree of expertise. Nearly every foray into digital knowledge production has an intellectual-property component. Either third-party materials are being used in the new work, so that fair use must be assessed, licensing terms considered, and/or permission sought, or the creators themselves are concerned about rights in the new work, which requires that the law and local policies be considered and agreements drafted as needed. On many campuses, the library is the academic unit that is best prepared to assist with these issues, especially where there is not a full-time campus attorney or if that attorney lacks specialist knowledge about copyright. Even librarians that feel ill prepared in this field probably have some experience with IP licenses and a little exposure to the broader issues. As consulting with digital projects becomes a larger part of library work, it will be necessary for most academic librarians to work to improve their facility in addressing copyright issues.

SERVICE RECONFIGURATION

All of the changes suggested above obviously imply reconfiguration of library services. But before I close, I want to briefly suggest four specific areas that have not yet been mentioned where the changes in our work will and should be brought to the notice of our administrators and others who have responsibility for the oversight of academic libraries.

First is an area where most academic libraries are already making new inroads—assessment of services. In the open-access movement, we often tell authors that the digital environment offers them exciting new ways to assess the impact of their work, and the same is true of library services. The simple fact is that through digital technologies we now have a great deal more data about how users interact with our services and resources. With that data comes both opportunity and responsibility. The responsibility, of course, is to ensure that we use the data in ways that protect the privacy of our patrons and to use what we learn in evenhanded and nondiscriminatory ways. The opportunity is to both better manage the user experience of the library and to provide a clearer picture to those who oversee our work of the myriad ways that libraries influence the lives of students, faculty, staff, and the general public.

This idea of our audience, the clientele that we reach, brings us to our second type of service reconfiguration: the growing need to serve a global audience. It is already the case for many, if not most, academic libraries that
their students and faculty members travel a great deal more than was the case a few decades ago, so we need to ensure that our electronic resources are available to them, accounting for both legal and technological barriers. In addition to this relatively familiar requirement, however, more and more academic campuses are developing a larger and more intentional global footprint. At my own institution, Duke University, our global vision anticipates the need to serve three "campuses"—the home base of the university, in Durham, North Carolina, a "network of sites and partnerships abroad," and the online environment, where our legitimate constituents might well be anywhere in the world and may, in fact, have never set foot on the Durham campus. This vision involves "outrageous ambition," as we like to say, but also real challenges that confront the libraries in terms of both services and access. In regard to the latter, digital resources are more important than ever, but the challenge of licensing access for a diverse clientele that is neither geographically fixed nor easily defined in advance is formidable. Services will also require careful delineation, so that the expectations of users from all of the different groups suggested above will have appropriate expectations about what services they can and cannot reasonably call upon.

To dwell just a minute longer on the access question, this move toward a global reach for our institutions and their libraries returns us again to issues we have already discussed and helps us understand the connectedness that is implicit in any vision of the future for academic libraries. Obviously, intellectual-property concerns are significant when we wish to provide access to a global client base, and license negotiations, which have already grown complex and contentious in the late 20th century will become even more difficult in the 21st. The expertise spoken of above in IP and copyright will be just that much more important in this global learning space. And the movement toward open access grows correspondingly in significance. Open access offers a potential means to cut through the complexities and, in many cases, impossibilities both financial and legal of supporting global education. As institutions reach for the corners of the globe, libraries that are prepared to support open resources of many different types will prove themselves that much more valuable.

The value of academic libraries, and the way we present the value proposition for libraries to our institutional administrators and trustees, is the third area I want to focus on regarding service reconfiguration. I hope it is obvious that the changes I have predicted and called for in the preceding pages will all tend toward making the academic library an even more central and trusted partner in the changing academic enterprise. One of the best reasons for preparing for the future of education is that libraries have so much to do, so much to offer, in support of that future. In the past we have measured our value, and presented it to our administrators, in terms of the size of our collections. Obviously, that is no longer an adequate measure, and even we
try to include access to online resources as part of the measure of “our” collection. In the decades ahead we will need to focus more on the services we provide, the diverse clienteles that we serve, and the new resources we have helped to create. Collections will not be unimportant, but they will be only a part of this new value proposition, which offers a more robust opportunity to make our administrators aware of how much we can and do contribute to the academic environment for the 21st century.

Finally, when we talk about the value of libraries and how we present ourselves to institutional administrators, we must address the huge issue of how we spend our money. This is the fourth reconfiguration I want to discuss briefly, and it is in many ways the most important.

For many years libraries have spoken of a “collections” budget, and the word implies the purchase of commodity materials from commercial sources. As I have said several times, the importance of purchasing materials that most other libraries also purchase in order to build collections that look remarkably alike has and will continue to diminish. The corollary to this declining importance of commercial collections, as well as the growing role for locally produced resources, will be the need to transition our spending priorities.

We will need to move more and more of the money we spend to the production side of resource development rather than the consumption side. That is, an increasing percentage of our “collection” dollars will be spent to support the creation and dissemination of scholarly works. This can take many forms: memberships with open-access publishers, subventions for non-profit publishers, or payments to production-oriented open-access projects like SCOAP3 or Knowledge Unlatched (which involves participation of university presses in imagining a new business model for academic monographs). The opportunities to invest in these knowledge-production and knowledge-dissemination projects will steadily increase, and libraries will need to seek ways to facilitate the transition to this new focus for spending. I am familiar with at least one academic library that is beginning to ask its subject bibliographers to spend a set portion of the monies allocated to each discipline on open-access, production-side projects in that field. This is just one of the imaginative ways that the needed financial transition will be undertaken.

Two further points should be made in regard to this growing need to transition to new spending priorities, and both relate to our earlier discussion of making the value proposition to university administrators. First, it is likely to cost us more in the short term in order to spend less in the long term. During a period of transition, extra funding is likely to be necessary to support knowledge production projects at the same time that we continue to rely heavily on commercial purchasing. But as this transition grows, and more resources are supported in such a way that access becomes open rather...
than exclusive to subscribers, money will become available. And the amount of money currently in the system seems more than adequate to support the academic knowledge production, especially once we are no longer paying for massive profit margins that benefit large corporate publishers.

The second point is that while we will eventually likely be able to spend less in a more completely open and nonprofit production environment, we will be getting more for our money. This is because openness—the ability of more people to access a given scholarly resource—is a greater value, according to the values of academic libraries, than closed access is. When we invest to create open resources, we serve our own constituents, including that global community for whom access is such a difficult conundrum, better. And we put the knowledge that is created on our campuses more directly in service to society. These values are important to communicate to our communities and our administrators, because they are directly relevant to the "return on investment" that is so much a part of contemporary academic assessment. We simply get more value for our money, when value is defined in truly academic terms, when we spend on open resources and nonprofit production activities that occur close to the academic source than we do when we buy access to commercially produced and gated resources.

CONCLUSION

In closing, I want to step back from this litany of predictions, all of which are subject to my opening caveat about the truth and utility of such prognostication, and indulge in two broad, almost platitudinous, reminders. In terms of specific predictions, many of the authors in these volumes will have a much better chance of accurately outlining specific developments over the remaining years of the 21st century. These authors have expertise and specific data to support their predictions, both stated and implied, and their essays will, I am confident, prove useful and productive even if the actual details of our future are different. So my most useful contribution is probably to remind all of us of two things as we begin the journey through these volumes.

The first reminder is of the old adage that we should always be aware of what we can change and what we cannot. This is sound advice in any situation, but for libraries facing the future it should be qualified by the realization that we can change more than we might think. As the digital future of the academy unfolds, we have a depth of opportunity that has not existed in many years, if ever, to influence what this evolution looks like. Everyone is struggling and experimenting with what teaching and research in the digital age will be, and the expertise of librarians gives us a leading role in those explorations. We do not need to fear the digital future if we step forward and
be sure that we have a place at the table as the future is planned. Only when we are ambitious about the influence we are able to exert can we afford to be at peace about the things we truly cannot change.

Finally, I want to end on this note: For many years we have focused on building library collections, but for the 21st century we will focus on building library communities. These communities will be extensive, overlapping, and shifting, but they will be the foundations for our complex future. They will be diverse groups of students, scholars, and other publics, and our roles will vary with the needs of each group and each project. Our best opportunity to navigate these complexities is to keep our eyes not as much on the resource or the services that we have provided in the past, but on the communities that will be our partners for the future.

NOTES

1. The Library Publishing Coalition, http://www.librarypublishing.org, which formed in 2013, is one example of this particular type of effort to shape the future before it is so rigidly formed that it is out of our hands.

2. In March 2013 the Association of College and Research Libraries published a White Paper on “The Intersections of Scholarly Communications and Information Literacy,” which can be found at http://www.acrl.al.org/acrlinsider/archives/6970. This White Paper, and the ongoing task force working on implementing some of its ideas, is just one example of efforts to reshape information literacy programs for the 21st century.


4. From slides used for the talk, which was given on May 13, 2014, that are in the possession of the author.

5. Plato, Phaedrus, 275 a, b.


7. The case culminated in the U.S. Supreme Court in Sony Corp. of America v. Universal City Studios, Inc., 464 U.S. 417 (1984), in which the court held that home recording for the purpose of time-shift was fair use under section 107 of the U.S. copyright law (Title 17 of the U.S. Code) and that therefore VCR manufacturer Sony was not liable for contributory infringement due to this “substantial non-infringing use.”

8. These three areas are borrowed from a talk given by Ivy Anderson of the California Digital Library at a symposium held in Berkeley, California, on April 3 and 4, 2014, on “The Next Great Copyright Act.” Ms. Anderson identified these three areas as aspects of the academic library where massive change can be expected due to digital technologies, and that is why they seemed appropriate here as well.


11. For example, one of my favorite definitions (apart from its gender-specific language) comes from Roscoe Pound, who is specifically considering lawyers: “The term (profession) refers to a group of men pursuing a learned art as a common calling in the spirit of a public service.” Although this concept of consultant is not explicit, I believe it is implied by the idea of a learned art, which emphasized the needed flexibility to address individual problems, and by the idea of public service.

12. Duke’s statement of this global vision can be found at https://global.duke.edu/vision.

13. This is the title of a library exhibit on the history of Duke; the online iteration of that exhibit is available at http://exhibits.library.duke.edu/exhibits/show/duke175.