

THREE TRUE STORIES AND THEIR (POSSIBLE) MORAL FOR THE FUTURE OF UH LIBRARIES AND LIBRARIANS

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THE FIRST TRUE STORY

Anybody who lived in Hawaii in 1973, and either had to drive a car or ride in a car, will certainly have vivid memories of the so-called "Arab Oil Crisis"--the amount of time one had to spend planning to buy gas; the frustrations and indeed dangers of standing in line or trying to get in line to buy gas; the dramatic increase in the price of gas; and various attempts by government at all levels to do something about the situation. The then-governor, George Ariyoshi, issued a ban--or at least a plea against--all non-essential automobile travel. He said people should use their cars only to drive to work. All pleasure driving was to be discontinued.

We publicly went on record at the time in opposition to this decree. While not opposed to Ariyoshi issuing a statement against unnecessary automobile travel, we felt that the Governor got it all wrong: if he wanted to make a contribution to solving Hawaii's transportation crisis, then he should have forbidden anyone from using their automobile to drive to work. He should have ordered the police to stop anyone driving and ask them where they were going. If they said they were going to work, they should have been immediately arrested, and a search warrant sent out for their employer as well. All people **going** to work, and all people requiring other people to go to work, should have been immediately jailed.

On the other hand, people who said they were going surfing, or to visit their auntie, or just cruisin'--all these people should have been filmed flashing shaka signs, and honored on the evening news as citizens who understood that the proper use of automobiles was for fun, status, and truly necessary travel. If you were driving your car because you needed a good place to make out, or you wanted to show off, or you desired to go to the beach with your surfboard and a cooler full of Primo (that, too, was possible then), then you should have been sent on your way, with applause. But if you believed it was, even in 1973, necessary to **go** to work, then you clearly deserved to be sent to a correction facility.

Twenty years later, this appalling situation persists. People are still **going** to work, and arguing about whether it is better to go in cars, busses, or trains! Yet, what was arguably true in 1973, before the invention and dissemination of personal computers, powerbooks, modems, cellular phones, fax machines, fiber optics, LANs and WANs, and all the rest most certainly is true now in 1993, and will be obvious to anyone who is not a traffic engineer, transportation consultant, commercial building contractor, or asphalt spreader well before 2003.

We must not do anything any more to encourage the people of our good state to **go** to work, whether it be by car, bus, subway, elevated tram, maglev, ferry, autogiro, or even bicycle. It is neither necessary nor desirable. A decade of experiments with telecommuting, including many successful experiments here in Hawaii, have made it absolutely clear that telework works; that all of the money some people propose to spend on fixed rail mass transit or more super highways can much better be spent by providing free to everyone the hardware, software, and orgware they need to do their work at home, or at least within walking distance of their home. There are no longer any good reasons against teleworking, and a wide range of jobs lend

themselves to telework (Weijers, Meijer and Spoelman 1992). Work which is performed at a distance from the fixed location of the employer or workplace (i.e. telework) often requires advanced information and communication technologies such as computers, faxes, and modems, but frequently telework can be performed now with the minimum of equipment--just a telephone and typewriter.

At present in the U.S., most teleworking is done in California where it is motivated in part by air quality management regulations which credit employers for reducing commuter trips by flextime, ridesharing, and telecommuting. Compliance with these regulations is mandatory, and the penalties are intended to be sufficiently severe that compliance will occur (Martin 1992: 34). Private sector telecommuting programs have been implemented at Pacific Bell, AT&T, Sears Roebuck, IBM, Verifone, and Rank Xerox, among others.

State, city and county governments in Arizona, California, Washington, Florida, Virginia and Hawaii are also among those developing and participating in telework programs (Martin 1992: 34). The Honolulu City and County Department of Data Systems has offered informal telecommuting for many years (Martin 1992: 37). In 1989, the Hawaii State Department of Transportation, in cooperation with the private sector, sponsored the Hawaii Telework Center Demonstration Project in order to test the feasibility and efficacy of such centers (SMS Research 1991: iii). The 17 workstations in the Center in Mililani Technology Park have been fully used by 24 private sector and government employees, with some stations shared on fixed or flexible schedules. The Project was overwhelmingly successful, and most workers elected to continue telecommuting to work (SMS Research 1991: 12).

Given recent and anticipated developments in, and the rapid proliferation of, even newer, smaller, faster, and cheaper communication technologies and networks, can anyone doubt that telework will increase and rival--if not eventually replace--physically commuting to central work locations?

THE SECOND TRUE STORY

Two or three years ago, I was a speaker at a conference of state librarians. Perhaps you were there and may recall what transpired. It happened to be the time when Hamilton Library was closed for asbestos removal. I divided the audience into several small groups and asked half of the groups to come up with as many reasons as they could why Hamilton should never be opened again. I asked the other half to give as many reasons as possible why it should be reopened.

The list of reasons why Hamilton Library **should not** be re-opened was very long, and revolved around the fact that almost everything done by going to the library could be done via remote electronic access. The list of reasons why Hamilton **should** be opened was very short and boiled down essentially to the fact that if there were no libraries, librarians would be out of work. While some said that might be OK in the long-run, the librarians present were unanimous in hoping that it wouldn't happen until they retired.

Anyone who is not a librarian in denial, or a residually romantic professor, knows that the libraries of the University of Hawaii are important primarily as places where the many non-resident students can find a quiet place to meet people, get out of the rain, rest, sleep and perchance to dream.

Anyone who tries to use the libraries to try to retrieve information, however, cannot help but be struck by the absurdity of shuffling, craning one's neck, through the narrowing stacks looking for certain books and journals. Chances are pretty good that what you are looking for is not where it is allegedly shelved. It is checked out, lost, stolen, misshelved, unshelved, at the bindery. And if you do locate the desired volume with the desired information printed in it, you then might stand in line to pay for the parts you want in the document to be photocopied onto different paper so you can take it home to read. Or you it might decide that you want to lug the entire volume to some other place where you can read the good parts when you have time, whereupon you soon may receive a notice demanding that you lug it back to the library for someone else to photocopy the good parts they want in it or else to lug the whole volume out again.

Of course the library may not be open at a time convenient for you anyway. And the chances are good that you want the information **now**, not whenever you can go to the library to retrieve it. Not to mention the problematic archival qualities of paper: its susceptibility to bugs, fungus, moisture, fire and vandalism.

This, while perhaps necessary and tolerable once upon a time when there was no better alternatives, is all plainly absurd now.

THE THIRD TRUE STORY

As we write this, because of yet another budget crunch (there will be many more, and more devastating, we can assure you), Hamilton Library is asking faculty to come to the library and tell the librarians which periodicals the faculty feel they can live without and thus can be canceled. "Our motto: tell us if you use, or lose it!" said an announcement in the UH Bulletin (29 March 1993, p. 3).

But why does the library continue to buy hard copies of journals, the contents of which were all produced on word processors? Journals are no longer the means of keeping current (Cohen 1992: 4). Most authors have already made the information freely available online (through e-mail) to their friends, or to the users of certain electronic networks, or even on the electronic version of those very same journals?

It seems to us that the duty of the contemporary librarian is to find ways to make all of such information freely (or at least very cheaply) available to everyone in remotely- and electronically-accessible forms. CARL is clearly a primitive future-trending early step in this direction which we deeply appreciate. We urge that more of the library's human, material, and fiscal resources be devoted to helping people locate and retrieve the information they want remotely, electronically, cheaply and instantly, and that substantially less time and resources be spent on planning the construction of more buildings and the acquisition and housing of more printed books and journals.

There are of course plenty of potential conflicts to be encountered en route to this "brave, new, digital world" (Cohen 1992: 12): publishers, librarians and authors engaged in protecting their jobs; the initial costs of going electronic; adaptation from paper to monitor and the rest. Yet while we know that some librarians may disagree with us, many, probably most, agree and feel that they already are doing all they can to push the sluggish system in this direction. If so, then please take our words as encouragement and not criticism. The future of information retrieval is clearly in this direction, we feel. So why waste more time in trying to maintain and

defend the crumbling cocoon when the caterpillar is already well on its way to metamorphosing into a butterfly?

Let gossamer-winged Information freely fly from flower to flower, cross-pollinating Knowledge with Knowledge, and in due time bringing forth in each of us the heavy fruits of Wisdom.

Well, all right!

THE MORAL TO OUR STORIES

As Joel Cohen writes (in an entirely electronic journal), academic and other literature is produced at astounding and exponentially-increasing rates. The resultant challenges of accessing these materials in a timely fashion, are gargantuan. But information retrieval is the librarian's specialty, isn't it?

In the future (or is it the present?) when, "instead of fortresses of knowledge, there will be an ocean of information" (Browning 1993: 62), librarians may still be more adept than others at obtaining, searching and retrieving information. Thus, while there may be a continued role for librarians as people who help other people access information, we don't see much need for **libraries** in the sense of **places** where information is stored and to which people must go in order to get it--or to which librarians must go in order to help people access it, and so to **be paid** for their labors. Librarianship can be practiced better from "home" than in a "library." Help everyone retrieve whatever information they seek wherever in the world they might be from "libraries without walls for books without pages" (Browning 1993).

In short, we wish to herald and hasten the day--which **will** come anyway without our in the least bit encouraging it--when people will no longer congregate in central places (downtown) to work, nor go to central places (libraries or universities) for information. Rather, as President Bush said in introducing the Statement on National Transportation Policy: "Sometimes the best policy means not moving people, but moving their work,...a trend known as telecommuting.... Think of it as commuting to work at the speed of light." (Quoted in Mokhtarian 1991: 323).

With these words, uttered by so lofty and thus credible a source (which we read, one day, in a journal at a carrel on the second floor of Hamilton Library, we must confess, not having enough quarters to photocopy and carry it home) we rest our case.

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