

Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: **Debbie Vaughn** (Adjunct Instructor, Clemson University) <vaughn.deborah@gmail.com>

Column Editor's Note: *This year's Charleston Conference considers the importance of being earnest with our collections. Collections include increasing numbers of digital resources — how do we manage such resources alongside print titles? How do we share information through repositories? How do we share information with patrons via the cloud? These topics will not only be addressed in plenary sessions, concurrent sessions, and lively lunches; they are also the focus of the titles reviewed in this month's book reviews.*

Many thanks to veteran reviewers **Patricia Dragon**, **Wm. Joseph Thomas**, and **Marjorie M.K. Hlava** for sharing their thoughts on these titles. Happy reading and happy conferencing, everyone! — DV

Blanke, Tobias. *Digital Asset Ecosystems: Rethinking Crowds and Clouds.* Chandos Information Professional Series. Kidlington, UK: Chandos, 2014. 978-1843347163. 192 pages. \$80.00 (print).

Reviewed by **Patricia Dragon** (Head, Special Collections Cataloging, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <dragonp@ecu.edu>

Digital Asset Ecosystems: Rethinking Crowds and Clouds, by **Tobias Blanke**, is an examination of digital asset management in our networked world. Less a defense of a particular position than an exposition of a new way of looking at the subject, **Blanke's** book serves as a good introduction to the field of digital asset management for those who have a fairly sophisticated understanding of modern computing. Many of **Blanke's** examples are geared toward businesses trying to harness big data to help them track public sentiment in real time, or develop the next killer app or device that no one can live without. The book is also useful, however, for librarians who wish to become familiar with the technologies and applications to which he refers, as they are facts of the information landscape in which we and our users live.

Pointing out that terms have been used vaguely by people who merely gesture toward their meaning, **Blanke** takes great pains to unpack and define terms. Digital assets, he explains, are digital objects with a value that can be economic, social, or cultural (2). Digital ecosystems he defines in biological terms, as the habitat in which crowds (lots of people) and clouds (lots of networked computers) work together to produce these assets, the whole of the ecosystem keeping stable in the face of problems with individual parts (23). The difficulty of defining such terms is compounded by the interrelatedness of all the concepts being defined. This interweaving of difficult concepts occasionally leads to text that this reader wished could have been more clearly written, although some amount of complexity is understandable.

After the introduction, **Blanke** examines various technologies involved in building the digital ecosystems of today, including APIs, XML, and virtualization, as well as some companies that have made varied use of cloud computing, including Netflix, Google, and Amazon. He outlines several different experiments in crowdsourcing, including Amazon's Mechanical Turk, to which he returns several times in the book as an ethical problem. The Web, he writes, has evolved over time to be

“something where humans and machines can both feel at home” (60), attributing feelings to machines in a manner that is disturbing but also seemingly related to his later discussion of the social impact of digital ecosystems.

Digital ecosystems, **Blanke** explains, can be closed or open, open ecosystems often concentrated in the sciences and government, closed more in the business world, for example the “walled garden” of Apple, whose devices interface perfectly with each other but not well with the outside world (71-72). This leads naturally into the concept of Big Data, produced by the crowds and with the ability to be curated and stored in the cloud. Big Data can almost mimic artificial intelligence, such as the Google car being able to drive itself, not by intelligently making decisions on the road as a human would, but by crunching enormous amounts of amassed data to guide itself (127). Big Data can have a positive impact on our lives, for instance when tweet patterns are analyzed to track epidemics, but also can branch into the sinister with the



NSA metadata scandal. Indeed, one of the great strengths of the book is its balanced approach to the rise of datafication, neither cheerleading relentlessly for the cause of progress nor warning direly of our loss of privacy and agency.

Throughout the book, **Blanke** refers to concepts and examples from a huge variety of sources, from Tim Berners-Lee to Marx. At times it may rely too heavily on others' ideas. A good deal of the discussion of Big Data is cited from **Mayer-Schönberger** and **Cukier's** 2013 book *Big Data: A Revolution that Will Transform How We Live, Work, and Think*; however, the present book does integrate these other sources into a new frame for the issue. The twenty-page bibliography is in itself a valuable contribution to scholarship in the area.

Perhaps the most passionately argued and original part of the book is the final examination of the social impact of the rise of digital ecosystems and the changing relationship between humans and computers, picturing them as partners working in the world today. Although some maintain that digital content management systems break down the task of creating digital assets into such small steps that all creativity is removed from the process, essentially functioning as digital conveyor belts on an assembly line, **Blanke** points out the positive empowerment of non-programmer workers that content management systems allow (124). Returning to the example of Amazon's Mechanical Turk, he raises ethical concerns about the extraction of free or extremely low-wage labor from crowds. In conclusion, **Blanke** emphasizes the need to examine the global workflows engendered by digital ecosystems, and for information and business professionals to understand how digital content's life expands well beyond the bounds of any one organization.

Buehler, Marianne A. *Demystifying the Institutional Repository for Success.* Chandos Information Professional Series. Oxford: Chandos Publishing, 2013. 978-1843346739. 266 pages. \$80.00.

Reviewed by **Wm. Joseph Thomas** (Assistant Director for Research and Scholarly Communication, Joyner Library, East Carolina University) <thomasw@ecu.edu>

The purpose for *Demystifying the Institutional Repository for Success* is to “convey a new direction” to open access repositories and their roles on campus, and to provide guidance and examples for both novice and experienced librarians to “accelerate open access to research” on their own campuses (xiii). It is organized into seven chapters, with an index and references. The first chapter focuses on the transition in scholarly communication

toward open access publishing, and includes sections defining scholarly communication and describing peer review. This chapter also briefly traces the development of some repository and journals systems that contribute to open access publishing, and concludes by summarizing recent U.S. legislations and the U.S. and UK funding mandates for open access. The second chapter describes launching an

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open access repository and developing talking points both for faculty and for administration. The third chapter lays out internal and external success factors for IRs, the variety of potential material types for items deposited, and addresses the possibility of campus mandates. The fourth and fifth chapters address building relationships within the library and across campus, including various topics such as staffing for an IR, creating an advisory board, and marketing open access opportunities to students for their works in addition to ETDs.

The greatest strength of *Demystifying* might lie in the chapter addressing the value and impact of an IR. Specifically within this section are discussions of the total cost of an IR, an overview of citation studies which demonstrate the benefits of open access, and the encouragement to add altmetrics to demonstrate the use of the IR. The concluding chapter looks to establishing partnerships between library IRs and campus partners on Open Educational Resources and data management.

Although there are hidden gems of advice in this book, it might have been organized differently and needs removal of unnecessary duplication. For instance, the descriptions of open access “flavors” comes very late in the book, as well as descriptions of IR platforms and the suggestion to draft an IR collection development policy — these might have been better placed earlier. Perhaps the most noteworthy lacuna in Buehler’s work is the topic of tenure. Busy professions who keep an eye on their reappointment cycles with every publication will need significant reassurance and understanding of how contributing to an IR will not jeopardize their careers. Brief mentions of tenure-seeking being less important than sharing scholarship and a quick note that mandatory deposits do not really undermine academic freedom to select a publisher are not enough to convince them.

Marianne Buehler is the Urban Sustainability Librarian and institutional repository administrator at the **University of Nevada, Las Vegas**. A veteran with more than 25 years of library experience, she has previously presented and published articles on institutional repositories, library services to distance education users, and library science education. This is her first book.