

“Slavic Studies and Slavic Librarianship” Revisited: Notes of a Former Slavic Librarian

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This article revisits the author's essay in Solanus on the state of Slavic librarianship at the turn of the twenty-first century in order to assess how the profession has changed in the interim. Trehub notes that the single most important effect of the proliferation of new library information technologies has been a gradual shift in emphasis from curation to creation. The library may no longer be the first stop in a student's research, but it remains the preferred venue for study, collaboration, social interaction, Internet use, and access to and help with specialized resources. The job of librarians—including Slavic librarians—is to build on their comparative advantage in these areas and re-integrate libraries into the students' information workflow. The author suggests that the best way to maintain Slavic studies' viability as a discipline is to participate more fully and be represented more prominently in the technology-driven scholarly digital initiatives that are transforming librarianship in general.

KEYWORDS *Digital scholarship, Slavic studies, information technology, information literacy, library, libraries*

In 2004, after almost twenty years of working as a Slavic studies analyst and librarian, I traded in my *shapka* for a NASCAR baseball cap (so to speak) and accepted a position as the director of library technology at Auburn University in Alabama. So when the editors of *SEEIR* first contacted me about revisiting my 2000 *Solanus* article¹ for this special issue on Slavic information literacy, my first reaction was to argue that my defection from the field disqualified me from commenting on more-recent developments. On reflection—and

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with some persuasion—I decided that my experiences outside Slavic studies might enable me to shed some light on and bring a different perspective to some of the issues facing the field today. This is especially true in the area of library technology, my current area of responsibility.

Before moving on to information technology, information literacy, and other library matters, I would like to fulfill the retrospective part of my charge and dwell for a moment on my treatment in the *Solanus* article of the development of Slavic Studies and Slavic librarianship in the United States—in particular, on the crucial importance I ascribed to the Cold War and the US-Soviet rivalry. This turned out to be an unexpectedly controversial point. Although one can argue about the degree to which the Cold War and US government policy shaped the field and helped to build the library collections that supported it, I believed that my nutshell history of Slavic studies in the United States was essentially accurate. Others took a different view, however, including the anonymous peer reviewers for this journal—which is how the article came to be published in *Solanus* and not in *SEEIR*. I was therefore reassured to see, in the course of researching this piece, that my chronology and interpretation matched those of Caryl Emerson, professor of comparative literature at Princeton University, who summarized the field's history in an address to the 2002 annual convention of the American Association of Teachers of Slavic and East European Languages (AATSEEL). “The Cold War was good for us professionally,” Emerson said; “indeed, the Cold War brought us into existence as a field.” She also acknowledged “the enormous role contemporary politics has always played in our establishment as a discipline.” This may be an unpalatable fact to some people in the field, but it strikes me as indisputable.²

Equally indisputable are the dangers of prognostication, as I learned upon re-reading my article. In the course of rebuking Frances Fukuyama for proclaiming the “end of history” in 1989, I promptly committed the same sin, writing with equally unfounded confidence that “it is clear that we have reached the end of history as we knew it in the years 1914–1989.”³ One year after those words were published, the United States suffered the most devastating assault on its territory since the War of 1812 and embarked on its most costly and divisive military campaign since the Vietnam War. I speak of course of the attacks of September 11, 2001 and the ensuing Global War on Terror—a war whose end is not in sight and whose ramifications are as far-reaching as those of the wars of the twentieth century, including the Cold War. Moral: never proclaim the end of anything based on current trends, especially where history is concerned. The same caveat may apply to my earlier comments about the future of Slavic librarianship. At the end of the *Solanus* article, I argued that Slavic studies and Slavic librarianship had experienced a post-Cold War relapse into normalcy—a “withering into the truth” was how I showily put it, stealing a line from W. B. Yeats. I also argued that the profession—Slavic librarianship—was coping rather well

with the fall from prominence of the field it serves. Was I right about that then, and if I was, is it still true today?

Judging by the fact that Slavic librarianship continues to survive as a distinct subspecialty, the profession appears to have successfully navigated the changes of the past decade. However, since my involvement in the field these days is limited to lurking on the *Slavlibs* e-mail forum—whose survival, by the way, could also be adduced as a sign of the field's continuing viability—I must rely on some of my former colleagues for an assessment of the current state of affairs. And here the picture is mixed. The consensus among the people I asked appears to be that the profession is in pretty good shape considering the turmoil of the past fifteen to twenty years—or at least it's in no worse shape than other area studies specialties. As one librarian put it to me in an e-mail, “Slavic is changing just like everything else and I don't think it is that different, other than the pace may be somewhat slower.”⁴ Another former colleague has written of a “small renaissance” in Slavic librarianship, with several new professionals entering the field in the past two or three years.⁵ I have come across other signs of continued vitality, such as the growing prominence of digital projects in Slavic Studies and Slavic librarianship, a prominence that has found official embodiment in the Digital Projects Subcommittee of the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies (AAASS) Bibliography & Documentation Committee;⁶ or the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation's recent grant program aimed at promoting collaboration among scholarly publishers, including publishers in the field of Slavic Studies.⁷ And I was pleased to see that librarians at the University of California at Los Angeles and Berkeley remedied a longstanding deficiency and published a comprehensive guide to Slavic library and archival collections in the United States and Canada in 2004—the first guide of its type since 1960.⁸

But there are also problems. In 2000, I identified the main problems in day-to-day Slavic librarianship as the erosion of bibliographic control, the disappearance of established vendors, inadequate acquisitions budgets, and ineffective exchange programs. Although exchange programs appear to have lost their saliency—none of the Slavic librarians I contacted for this piece mentioned them—the other three problems have not. Indeed, problems with bibliographic control affect librarianship in general, not just Slavic librarianship. For example, in late 2006 the US Library of Congress formed the Working Group on the Future of Bibliographic Control.⁹ The working group issued its final report in January 2008. The report focuses heavily on changes in information technology and recommends (among other things) that libraries “position our technology for the future” and “design for today's and tomorrow's user.” The consequences of failing to do so? “Library users will continue to bypass catalogs in favor of search engines” and “resources needed to catalog at a sophisticated level [will become]

increasingly difficult to sustain.”¹⁰ We are already seeing these trends at work in our library, and I know that we are not alone.

The other two problems—disappearing vendors and inadequate budgets—remain as timely as ever. The sudden, unexpected, and disruptive demise of the Russian Press Service in April 2008 is evidence of the former. For some Slavic librarians, it revived memories of the turbulent days after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. Brad Schaffner, the head of the Slavic Division at Harvard University’s Widener Library, expressed the hope that the demise of RPS “is not the start of another round of collapse similar to the situation after the fall of the Soviet Union.”¹¹ Schaffner listed other points of concern: the weak dollar; prices for foreign publications outstripping already inadequate budgets; the rising cost of shipping materials (the immediate cause of RPS’s going out of business); reports of declines in graduate enrollments in Slavic studies programs; and moves to cut back, disperse, or dilute major Slavic collections in the United States. Examples of the latter include proposals to dismantle the renowned Slavic and East European Library (and other area-studies libraries) at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign; and to turn the Library of Congress’s European Reading Room into an exhibit space.¹²

Misguided as they may be, these initiatives point to a much larger issue: the erosion of confidence in the traditional mission of the humanities and the value of a liberal-arts education. In a recent article deploring the actual or impending closures of German departments at a large private and a medium-sized public university in California, Will Corral and Daphne Patai recalled the fate of the Slavic languages and literatures department at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, which was abolished in the 1990s. “Given the general lack of commitment to a coherent view of the humanities and their significance,” Corral and Patai wrote, “it is unavoidable that particular departments, especially in foreign languages, will be slated for elimination or revamping according to currently fashionable trends.”¹³ If Corral and Patai are right, then the implications in the long run for Slavic Studies—and Slavic librarianship—are discouraging.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY, INFORMATION LITERACY, AND DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP

But since, as J. M. Keynes said, in the long run we are all dead (or at least retired), the real issue is what we can do to address the most important challenge facing Slavic librarianship today. To quote Brad Schaffner again, “the biggest change to Slavic librarianship” in the past decade “has come as a result of technical advancements.” As befits the head of a library with extensive collection development responsibilities, Schaffner focused on the financial aspects of technological change, in particular the difficulty of

supporting both digital and traditional collections on an analog-era budget. However, I would suggest that it is just as important to figure out how we as a profession can best take advantage of new information technologies. This is where the notion of information literacy comes into play.

The American Library Association defines information literacy as “the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze, and use information.”¹⁴ More expansively, information literacy could be defined as the process of teaching people not only how to access and use new information technology, but also how to understand the way information is organized, so that they can assess for themselves its relevance and reliability and integrate it seamlessly into their work. Readers who were educated in the analog era may be forgiven for spotting strong similarities between information literacy and the array of skills and practices described by Jacques Barzun and Henry Graff in their classic *The Modern Researcher* (1957).¹⁵ However broadly one defines it, adopting information literacy as a new liberal art at a time when the liberal arts are being “kicked off campus” may not be a winning strategy for Slavic librarians, or librarians in general.¹⁶ Still, there is general agreement that the advent of the new information technologies has fundamentally changed research, writing, and pedagogy. For example, when I took a Slavic bibliography course at the University of Illinois in the early 1990s, the syllabus was almost exclusively paper-based (some microfilm was also involved), and much of it was late-nineteenth-century paper at that. By the time I left Illinois in 2004, the same course was heavily electronic, with a strong emphasis on online resources and digital collections. While it is not yet possible to search a fully indexed Web facsimile version of V. I. Mezhov’s *Russkaia istoricheskaia bibliografiia* [Russian historical bibliography], I am confident that, thanks to mass digitization, it soon will be. At that point the question will be: Do all students who need to know about Mezhov’s work actually know that it is available online? Will they even know why they should consult Mezhov in the first place?

The growing importance of information technology and information literacy in Slavic librarianship and librarianship in general is the result of three things: Web browsers, affordable digital publishing tools, and Google. What we have witnessed in the past fifteen years is nothing less than the birth and growth of an entirely new communications medium. I would argue that the Web has already surpassed previous media—radio, cinema, and television—in its power, immediacy, and influence on our lives. Blogs, Wikis, social networking sites, and free or inexpensive digital content-management software have given millions of people the ability to be not only their own printing presses and publishing houses, but also wire services, photo agencies, recording studios, movie production companies, and advertising firms. Google and other search engines enable millions of other people to find these self-published works. More to the point for our

field, Google has enabled millions of people to bypass libraries completely in their search for information.

And millions of people are taking advantage of the opportunity. Numerous studies confirm what reference librarians observe in their daily work: that students overwhelmingly prefer Google and other commercial search engines to the specialized information resources libraries offer. For example, an OCLC survey conducted in 2006 revealed that 89% of the college students questioned began their information searches with Google or another search engine.¹⁷ Even more disturbingly for reference librarians, the same survey revealed that only a small percentage of students—in this case, 2%—say that they “consult librarians when seeking help from a trusted source.”¹⁸ This finding echoes a 2001 study of usage patterns at the Harold B. Lee Library at Brigham Young University.¹⁹ For those who believe that information literacy means knowing which tools to use for a given purpose, this is not necessarily a bad thing. Google is a powerful tool whose use should be encouraged, when appropriate.²⁰ After all, the issue is not where researchers start their search, but where they end it. Still, the very fact that the library is no longer the preferred starting point for most research projects has left many members of our profession feeling marginalized. And not without some justification, since Google searches do not always (or even often) lead to the library, or to the very expensive proprietary databases that we spend millions of dollars each year to license.

One point has emerged pretty clearly from the welter of technology-driven change: the library is no longer perceived as the sole or ultimate source of authoritative information, or of guidance on how to use it. However, the library does appear to be the preferred venue for study, collaboration, social interaction, Internet use, and access to and help with specialized resources. The job of librarians—including Slavic librarians—is to build on our comparative advantage in these areas and re-integrate libraries “into the information workflow of our students.”²¹ The question, of course, is how to do that. In my 2000 *Solanus* piece, I identified the collaborative production of bibliographies and other online reference resources as one way to take advantage of the new technologies. As a former bibliographer, I retain a fondness for the well-crafted MARC record and respect the purpose of bibliography as an enterprise, which is to organize created knowledge and present it in a usable way. So I was dismayed to hear my colleague Tom Wilson, the Associate Dean for Library Technology at the University of Alabama, proclaim “the death of bibliography” in his keynote presentation to the 2008 Electronic Resources and Libraries Conference in Atlanta, Georgia.²² Wilson’s point was that people want access to the thing itself—for example, the full text of an article, book, or book chapter—and not a bibliographic surrogate for that thing, however well-crafted it may be. In this he is surely correct, and thanks to Google Books, the Open Content Alliance, and other mass-digitization

projects, the vision he describes is rapidly becoming a reality. But does that mean that bibliographies (like those of Mezhov) and other traditional reference tools have entirely outlived their usefulness?

Perhaps. In the *Solanus* article, I touted the collaboration between the *American Bibliography of Slavic and East European Studies* (*ABSEES*) and its European counterpart, *EBSEES*. This now appears to have been an infelicitous example. *ABSEES* is still alive and apparently well: it continues to be compiled at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with help from contributing editors at other institutions, and is being marketed by EBSCO Information Services. Unfortunately, *EBSEES* has not survived the technological and administrative challenges of the past decade, most importantly the loss of its long-time editorial headquarters at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales in Paris. According to the Osteuropa-Abteilung of the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin—the bibliography's current home—no new records have been or will be added to *EBSEES* after December 31, 2007. The bibliography is now a static resource, covering the years 1991–2007. So the dream of combining the two bibliographies to form a comprehensive guide to scholarship in our field published “north of the Rio Grande and west of the Oder-Neisse Line” is defunct.²³ On the plus side, *EBSEES* is getting a new search interface, with faceted browsing and tag clouds.²⁴

But perhaps Wilson's obituary for traditional reference tools is premature. Take, for example, *Wikipedia*. As everyone reading this article probably knows, *Wikipedia* is a free, multilingual, communally-edited online encyclopedia. Launched in January 2001 by Jimmy Wales (an Auburn University alumnus) and Larry Sanger, it currently contains 10 million articles (2 million in the English-language version) and attracts over 680 million visitors each year.²⁵ So it would appear that there is considerable demand for (some) traditional reference resources, albeit in new guises. This is a demand that librarians can take advantage of. Some are: Ann Lally and Carolyn Dunford recently published an article in *D-Lib Magazine* on using *Wikipedia* to direct students to digital collections at the University of Washington Libraries.²⁶ We have started doing the same thing at the Auburn University Libraries, adding links to our digital resources in Alabama-related articles in the encyclopedia. Slavic librarians might consider following suit, contributing articles and external links to *Wikipedia*—or to its peer-reviewed counterpart, *Scholarpedia*,²⁷ or maybe even a discipline-specific encyclopedia (*Slavipedia*?) or Wiki.²⁸ Another way for librarians to integrate Slavic collections into students' information workflow is to partner with teaching faculty in Slavic studies departments and incorporate library resources into Blackboard, Sakai, Moodle, and other Web-based course-management systems. Helen Sullivan has written about doing precisely that at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.²⁹ Collaborating directly with teaching faculty to include library holdings in the course syllabus is hardly a

new activity for librarians—it has been going on for decades—but Web-based course-management systems increase its reach and effectiveness. They also give librarians the opportunity to incorporate subject-specific guidance on research skills, strategies, and approaches—i.e., information literacy—directly into the course syllabus, in a way that can be consulted by students remotely and at any time. For example, the resource page for a course on nineteenth-century Russian history would be a good place to link to a librarian-produced, Web-based video introducing students to Mezhev and other bibliographic resources. In other words, BI on *YouTube*. Stranger things have happened.

Finally, there is digitization and the creation of new digital resources. A 2003 OCLC report on library technology trends predicted that “digitization...may emerge as the most significant new format trend by 2007.”³⁰ That prediction seems well on its way to being fulfilled. Many academic and even public libraries have embarked on local digitization projects and are adding digitization to their list of routine activities. Slavic collections are contributing modestly to this trend. I have already mentioned the Digital Projects Subcommittee of the AAASS Bibliography & Documentation Committee. The *Inventory of Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Digital Projects* at the Slavic and East European Library at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign currently lists over 170 digital projects at libraries, museums, and archives around the world.³¹ Among many other projects, it includes *Seventeen Moments in Soviet History* (a multimedia timeline of the years between 1917 and 1991) at Michigan State University, the Prokudin-Gorskii collection of color photographs from pre-revolutionary Russia at the Library of Congress, the Harvard Project on the Soviet Social System collection at the Harvard College Library, and *Russia Engages the World* at the New York Public Library.³²

As ex-Slavicist Abby Smith famously asked some years ago, “Why digitize?”³³ There are a number of reasons:

- Improving accessibility and visibility. Digitizing the library’s unique holdings makes them available to the largest possible audience and encourages their use in teaching, learning, and research.
- “Branding.” Increasingly, many academic libraries offer an identical selection of commercial databases to their users. Digitization allows libraries to highlight their unique collections and establish a distinctive identity.
- Conservation. Digitization reduces the need to handle fragile or light-sensitive originals.

These are all good reasons for instituting a digitization program, but I would add another, even more compelling reason: to strengthen the library’s connection with teaching faculty and especially students by involving them in projects that combine primary source materials with advanced information

technology to produce high-quality online resources. In other words, digitization can be used to position the library as a center for the production of digital scholarship and an equal partner in the teaching process.

It is interesting and encouraging that the impetus for such an alliance is coming from scholars, primarily in the humanities. One of the most eloquent champions of library-based digital scholarship is Ed Ayers, formerly a professor of history at the University of Virginia and currently the president of the University of Richmond. In the 1990s, Ayers conceived and supervised the design of the well-known digital repository, *The Valley of the Shadow: Two Communities in the American Civil War*.³⁴ In the years since then, he has advocated assigning weight to digital scholarship in promotion and tenure decisions—a crucial point—and has spoken eloquently and amusingly about the successes and failures of his attempts to fuse scholarship and teaching with digital technology.³⁵ In our own field, Patricia Hswe has encouraged Slavic scholars and librarians to get involved in digital scholarship, highlighting the possibilities for “collaborative efforts between faculty, students, librarians, and programmers.” She has also touched indirectly on the BI benefits of digital scholarship, pointing out that today’s students “are wired, connected, and geared to go with their gadgets” and calling digital collections “an incredible resource for librarians who are looking for up-to-date user services and relevant approaches to user education.”³⁶

Of course, not all students (or librarians, for that matter) are as tech-savvy as stereotypes would suggest. And, despite its manifest benefits, even encouraging faculty to get involved in digital scholarship can be difficult. In my comments on a panel of papers on this subject at the AAASS conference in Boston in 2004, I identified several obstacles, most of them having to do not with technology, but with culture. Specifically, with academic culture: academic politics, rituals, incentive systems, and bureaucratic styles. Information scientists might call this phenomenon *social informatics*, while proponents of Slavic information literacy might include it among the professional competencies expected of savvy library patrons.³⁷ Whatever it’s called, an easy familiarity with the academic culture of a specific discipline (in this case, Slavic studies) is at least as important as a knowledge of scanning resolutions, file formats, controlled vocabularies, markup languages, and metadata schemas for the success of such programs. I have often heard presenters at conferences on institutional repositories say that the technological challenges of creating a repository are trivial when compared with the social and cultural ones. In other words, culture trumps technology. My experience as the director of library technology and as a manager of digitization projects at Auburn University tends to support that axiom.

The first problem is prosaic. Senior (read: tenured) faculty members do not need to work on digital projects. They have cleared the tenure hurdle

and can work on what they choose, at their own pace. They may regard digital projects with skepticism, or as yet another unlooked-for and unwelcome intrusion. This is especially likely to be true if they happen to be older or unfamiliar with information technology, born-digital scholarship, and new models of scholarly communication. I don't want to be unfair to older faculty members who are both interested in and knowledgeable about the new information technologies. In general, though, getting senior faculty members interested in digital projects is a tough sell. For their part, junior (read: untenured) faculty members have other things on their minds. The main one is getting tenure. Digital projects still do not have a lot of clout where promotion and tenure are concerned (although this is changing, slowly, at some institutions). There's little or no prestige in doing them. Indeed, depending on the departmental culture, getting too much involved in digital projects can be detrimental to a junior scholar's academic career. At least that is the perception, and it is hard to overcome it when the professional stakes are so high.

Apart from these prosaic considerations, there are more-substantive reasons for junior and senior faculty members to balk at investing time and effort in digital projects. I mentioned skepticism. Faculty members—especially faculty members in the humanities and social sciences—may wonder, sometimes justifiably, whether digital projects really contribute to better learning and research. They may ask where exactly the value lies for them and their research. As a colleague at one of the aforementioned conferences on institutional repositories put it, faculty members and other researchers tend to be focused on “me, me, and me,” often for good reason. They are unlikely to be persuaded by arguments about broader accessibility, better preservation, application of standards, and opportunities for collaborative research and instruction. And they may find it difficult to see exactly how creating and “publishing” high-quality digital resources for teaching and research purposes—resources that may be based on the library's or archives' materials but that go beyond those materials by including additional information and scholarly apparatus such as essays or links to related resources—can help them to address the crisis in scholarly publishing, a crisis that has been brought about by publishers selling back to the universities their own intellectual output.

Finally, there are concerns about the pedagogical value of digital resources per se. When I first started working at Auburn, I gave a pitch about the Auburn library's digital projects at a monthly meeting of the Auburn University History Department. The reception was polite but reserved. This may have had to do with my deficiencies as a salesman, but it may also have reflected genuine reservations about what I was selling. As I was demonstrating a set of digitized historical photographs from one of the library's special collections, a tenured but youngish faculty member said that this was all very nice, but in his view it just reinforced one of the most

pernicious trends among his students—namely, their reluctance to read books and other traditional printed materials. The only response I could offer at the time was to speculate that involving students in the creation of new digital resources would force them to engage with texts and other primary-source materials, since these are the raw materials for most digital projects. Since then, I have seen that digital projects can indeed be used pedagogically to promote the same level of engagement with primary-source materials that close reading of traditional texts does. Perhaps just as importantly, such projects allow faculty to integrate new technology and digital resources into their own teaching, thereby presenting them with an ideal opportunity to modify their students' information-seeking behavior, instead of complaining about it.

It's not all bad news and pushback, however. We have found that there are ways to get teaching faculty interested and involved in digital projects. Here are some practical suggestions for promoting digital scholarship through the library:

- Start a lecture series in the library on the new information technologies and their impact on teaching and learning. For maximum credibility, have the guest lecturers be faculty members at other universities who have actually done digital projects and incorporated them into their classes or research.
- Get support from the institutional office of information technology or the academic departments to send teaching faculty to EDUCAUSE, the Coalition for Networked Information, the Digital Library Federation, and other conferences devoted to information technology, libraries, and higher education in general.
- Work on getting digital projects recognized in the promotion and tenure system at your institution. If you are a librarian, ask your dean or director to work with his or her counterparts on campus to put this on the administration's agenda. Until digital projects count in the tenure calculus, it will be an uphill battle to get faculty (especially junior faculty) to spend time on them.
- If gift resources are available—a big *if*—and the terms of the gift permit it, consider diverting money from a gift fund or endowment to create a modest grant program to support faculty-initiated digital projects in the library. The Cornell University Libraries have had such a program in place since 2004. To date, the Faculty Grants for Digital Library Collections program has supported over twenty digital projects involving faculty from different departments at Cornell, including an ongoing project based on the library's holdings of underground Polish publications from the Solidarity era.³⁸ The Auburn University Libraries launched a much smaller pilot version of the Cornell program last year, using interest from a gift fund. The pilot program's first project—a digital collection devoted to a

pioneering American female philanthropist of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, based on biographical research conducted by an Auburn history professor—will be unveiled later this year. A second digital project—with an East European focus, as it happens—is in the works and should be ready to be made public in early 2010. The grant amounts in both cases have been modest: between \$3,000 and \$5,000 per project, with most of the money being used to hire student assistants and fund research trips. The libraries are supporting the projects through staff time, consultation, and the use of the libraries' digital production facilities. The collections are being hosted on library server computers and will be added to the Auburn University Digital Library.³⁹

There are other areas in which librarians can make a positive contribution to digital projects and digital scholarship. One is digital preservation. Digital preservation is the flipside of creating digital collections. Although it does not have a direct connection to bibliographic instruction, information literacy, or research, it is an increasingly important part of any digitization program. With support from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), Auburn University is currently partnering with the Alabama Department of Archives and History in Montgomery and five other colleges and universities around the state to create a geographically distributed digital preservation network using Stanford University's LOCKSS (Lots Of Copies Keep Stuff Safe) software.⁴⁰ The Alabama Digital Preservation Network (ADPNet) currently contains identical copies of selected digital collections on server computers at all seven member institutions.⁴¹ More content is on the way, and we hope to recruit more members to the network in the coming year. There is no reason why the major Slavic collections in the United States could not join forces and set up a Private LOCKSS Network (PLN) for the preservation of digital collections in Slavic Studies.⁴²

CONCLUSION: FROM CURATION TO CREATION

Re-reading one's past work is educational if not always pleasant, and I would give my *Solanus* article an overall grade of B+. In retrospect, I think I got more things right than wrong, and I am gratified to see that I devoted almost half the article to the effects of the new information technologies, including their potential negative effects. On the minus side, I think that I overestimated the importance of traditional bibliography and grossly underestimated the importance—or at least the popularity—of Google and improved search technologies. And my perception of Slavic studies' viability as a discipline may have been too sanguine.

It seems to me that there is little that Slavic librarians can do to forestall the feared decline of area and language studies or the humanities in general.

What they can do is to participate more fully and be represented more prominently in the technology-driven trends that are transforming librarianship and indeed other professions as well. Looking back over my twenty years as a librarian, I would say that the single most important development in that time has been a shift in emphasis from curation to creation. That is, from acting as the organizers and stewards of content created by other people and agencies to becoming content creators in our own right. Stewardship and preservation of the materials entrusted to us is an honorable and important job, now perhaps more than ever. But I would like to see us—and here I rejoin temporarily the ranks of practicing Slavic librarians—get more involved as a profession in designing and producing digital scholarship. In this connection, it is perhaps not a bad thing that some Slavic librarians are leaving their home discipline for broader areas in librarianship and scholarly communication and are devoting themselves to promoting information literacy (in its broadest sense) for students and faculty members. At the beginning of this piece, I referred to my *defection* from the field. I now think that was the wrong word. *Venturing beyond the field* would have been closer to the mark—and with the possibility of return. To close with another quotation, this time from one of Osip Mandel'shtam's last poems: “*My vernemsia eshche, razumeite!*” [We'll be back—count on it!].⁴³

NOTES

1. Aaron Trehub, “Slavic Studies and Slavic Librarianship in the United States: A Post-Cold War Perspective,” *Solanus*, n.s., 14 (2000): 91–108.

2. Caryl Emerson, “Slavic Studies in a Post-Communist, Post 9/11 World: For and Against Our Remaining in the Hardcore Humanities,” *Slavic and East European Journal* 46, No. 3 (2002): 449, 451. See also Victoria E. Bonnell and George Breslauer, “Soviet and Post-Soviet Area Studies” and Ellen Comisso and Brad Gutierrez, “Eastern Europe or Central Europe? Exploring a Distinct Regional Identity,” both in *The Politics of Knowledge: Area Studies and the Disciplines*, ed. David L. Szanton, University of California Press/University of California International and Area Studies Digital Collection, Edited vol. 3, (Berkeley, CA, 2002–2003), <http://repositories.cdlib.org/uciaspubs/editedvolumes/3>.

3. Trehub, “Slavic Studies and Slavic Librarianship,” 96.

4. Michael Brewer, e-mail to the author, April 10, 2008.

5. Bradley Schaffner, “Message from the Chair,” Association of College and Research Libraries, Slavic and East European Section, *Newsletter* 23 (2007): 2–3.

6. Miranda Remnek, “The AAASS Bibliography and Documentation Committee’s Working Group on Digital Projects,” *Slavic & East European Information Resources* 6, no. 4 (2005): 81–85.

7. Scott Jaschik, “New Collaboration for Scholarly Publishing,” *Inside Higher Ed*, December 28, 2007, <http://insidehighered.com/news/2007/12/28/mellon>.

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42. I am informed by the editors that the East Coast Consortium for Slavic Collections (ECCSC) is spearheading a LOCKSS-based initiative aimed at harvesting and preserving selected Slavic e-journals in the regular LOCKSS network. The ECCSC is composed of several major academic and public libraries (Cornell, Dartmouth, Duke, Harvard, Library of Congress, New York Public Library, New York University, Princeton, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, University of Toronto, and Yale).

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