Library Review
The Network Reshapes the Library: Lorcan Dempsey on Libraries, Services, and Networks, by Lorcan Dempsey; edited by Kenneth J Varnum

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The Network Reshapes the Library is an interesting experiment in library literature, containing some excellent insights into librarianship in the 21st century.

Lorcan Dempsey is often quoted and referred to throughout the sector for the level of thought he puts toward how contemporary libraries operate and who they serve. Dempsey has been witness and record of the vast change in technology and information over the past decade, and has documented many of his ideas in a blog: Lorcan Dempsey's Weblog on Libraries, Services and Networks (http://orweblog.oclc.org/).

The book, an edited collation of these blog posts, is divided into nine sections. The first two, 'Networked Resources' and 'Networked Organization', focus on what a library is and does. The idea of connecting people with information in order to create new knowledge – and start the cycle again – isn't new, but with the approach in the book (and on the blog), the subject is divided into easily understandable pieces.

'In the Flow' explores how libraries can better position themselves to be a (if not 'the') relevant link in the information chain by placing themselves within a researcher's workflow. This section should be required reading for those interested in moving beyond the old library service paradigm. 'Resource Discovery' and 'Library Systems' delve into the aspects of recent front-of-house and back-of-house advances. At a time when many libraries are investigating changing one or both of these services, these provide much to consider and discuss.

The 'Data and Metadata' section looks into the role that both play within libraries, though the focus here is mostly metadata. Since data – especially research data – has seen exponential growth over the past decade, its absence here is noticeable. 'Publishing and Communication' goes into various aspects of both, including blogging, digital books and distant reading. It's an interesting view of how the concept of publishing has changed over time.

The 'Libraries' section is a bit of a misnomer – ideas here relate to the wider GLAM (gallery, library, archive and museum) sector. In most of these pieces, one could replace the word 'library' with one of the other GLAM descriptors, and the sentiment would be dead on.

The final section, entitled Lorcan's Picks, are those that 'did not fit neatly into one of the other topical categories'. This mix is a good way to round out the book, going from his first post (23 October 2003) through reflections on the curatorial role. It shows Dempsey's wide range of interests, highlighting his accessible style.

Whilst the content is largely excellent, the context and presentation is troubling. A book of blog posts can seem just that – disconnected and random. This is amplified by its lack of connection to the medium of the web – linking. 'Links' are provided through underlined text and footnotes of the links themselves, but this lacks the dynamism of the web, and seems a dated approach. It would be good if the book offered a single persistent link for the book that provided readers a way to actually click on the resources referenced. Yes, one could visit the original blog and follow the links, but then why have the book?

The addition of 'comments' to the work is also odd. These don't necessarily relate to content on the page, and seem largely to be better suited as back-of-book blurbs. In situ they only to needlessly boost the page count.

Overall, if you enjoy Dempsey's thinking, or are in search of a concise (and non-networked) reference to the innovative topics, challenges and ideas in librarianship, this book is a solid investment.