This is a tough book to review. First, any compilation of radical/revolting/recidivist/just-plain-pain-in-the-ass pieces by working librarians deserves to be taken seriously. Second, Redux naturally led me back to the 1972 original since ten of the original contributors were contacted and contributed short or republished pieces, including the original guiding light Celeste West (who reveals that she was the model in the photo behind the discreetly-placed “Happiness is An Uncensored Library” bumper sticker in the original). There is definitely a contrast between the spirit of the 1972 volume (which sold in astounding numbers) with its Redux progeny, though many of the same themes still resonate.

The new volume contains some right-on-the-money pieces which I cannot imagine could be published elsewhere, save in the pages of this journal. While the tired “image issue” is woven thoroughly throughout this volume (a profoundly depressing growth in coverage from the original), Polly Thistlethwaite has finally nailed it for good in her essay “Old Maids and Fairies.” She notes that this “issue” bothers us so much because the “stereotypes read QUEER with a capital Q.” She backs it up with concise, clear analysis, summing up the reasons for our obsession with image very nicely. Enough said. The 1972 volume was way ahead of its time on gay issues generally, decrying anti-gay library services, library culture, and classification in many of the essays. It is good to note that Redux follows up on this admirably. Contributors comment on their connections to gay and lesbian library users – particularly kids, and push hard for inclusion of relevant literatures, ‘zines, and alternative news sites of all types. There have been forms of progress in the intervening years.

There are some nice essays on the “Failures of Neo-Corporatism” (written by an “unrepentant capitalist”), “Damage Noted: Journal of a Public Librarian,” and the cheeky “Astrology and Library Job Correlation.” The various analyses of post 9/11 laws sprinkled throughout are good too. I like Redux, but I can’t help feel, when I look back at what it is redux-ing, that our various forms of revolting are a bit more self-centered than we’d like to admit. Library education is still slapped around, but the grousing this time is less on the former unfairness of “the man” and “the system” generally than on “this worthless credential is keeping me from a better job” or “this degree didn’t pay off quite like I’d hoped.” There are good pieces again on language bias.
in various aspects of our work, but they don’t go much beyond the 1972 volume’s pieces. Taken together, the essays, detailing various forays into corporate and for-hire library work, are more depressing than I think either the editors or the writers intended. Lastly, there is the startling little factoid that proportionally more of the contributors are anonymous in 2003 than in 1972. If you throw in the semi-anonymous (the entries about the contributors were unclear if a nom de plume was used or there weren’t enough specifics to tell), the gap between 1972 and 2003 is larger yet (about 19% vs. 30%). If you set aside the original ten who chipped in again, that gap grows further still. This speaks ill not only of the zeitgeist, but also perhaps to the relative state of health of “revolting” amongst librarians.

So where does this leave us? Again, I like the volume, but my overall impression is that the librarians who contributed to Redux have by and large absorbed the identity politics notion that personal liberation in style somehow equals political liberation – or will. Why else go out of the way to include so much of the purely confessional or the number of cats/dogs and their habits, preference for weightlifting and/or martinis, enjoying good sex, the presence of children, or the affinity for hues of hair dye? Redux’s striving for the offbeat (“a diffident Englishman surprised to find himself working with rare books. His favorite medical subject headings are CULTURE MEDIA and BLAST CRISIS”) is probably linked to the growth of prevalence of the image issue throughout the volume. Read past the cataloger-who-finds-therapy-in-pedicure-sessions stuff and I think you’ll find some useful, funny, and insightful bits and observations on the current state of librarianship. But I must say, thirty years should have brought us farther.