Library Juice Concentrate, edited and mostly written by Rory Litwin. Duluth, MN: Library Juice Press, 2006.

Reviewed by Douglas Raber

The material Rory Litwin collected for *Library Juice Concentrate* is available in its original online format at libr.org/juice/ but it's nice to have it available in a book. By taking the material offline and making choices about what to include, Litwin provides what he calls "classic information"; contextualized knowledge intentionally communicated for a discernable purpose. Each piece in the collection informs and is informed by the others. The intellectual coherence of digital material can be overlooked when "content" is consumed one item at a time online. Gathered in a book these pieces, most of them written by Litwin, come together to represent a critical professional consciousness. As with any book, readers are free to "link" these pieces in as many creative ways as they choose, perhaps by writing notes to themselves in the margins.

Litwin's book reveals a set of tensions that condition professional practice. Each can be framed as a competing imperative. Librarians must adapt their practices to developing technologies yet guard against implications that threaten librarianship's founding principles. They must adopt an activist stance toward the social problems libraries are intended to solve yet preserve the conserving functions of librarianship. They must maintain a commitment to intellectual freedom yet not abdicate social responsibility. Litwin argues that librarianship's founding principles are simultaneously communitarian and libertarian. Libraries allow collectives to share the economic burden of making knowledge accessible thereby supporting individual aspiration and liberty. Because the use of library resources does not diminish their value they are available for re-use. Libraries are models of sustainability. Truth, knowledge and learning are central to individual and social enrichment that is the purpose of democratic culture. Because libraries preserve and provide these values they are crucial democratic institutions. Librarianship is necessarily a democratic practice, but that practice can be distorted to serve non-democratic ends.

Librarians must be clear about three political concepts that are central to their work: neutrality, objectivity, and the political center. They must respect the right of users to think for themselves; to use material they judge relevant for whatever purpose they choose. Being neutral, however, does not allow librarians to suspend personal or professional judgment regarding social problems and community needs. Not taking a side is taking a side, usually one that serves dominant political interests. Material that is objective is not necessarily value-free and limiting collections to apparently "objective" items is to engage bias, usually privileging dominant ideas. Finally, the political center is not the middle ground where general agreement resides but instead a constantly shifting balance of power between dominant and

subordinate interests in differentiated social structures. The center is where justice is pursued.

Given these principles, Litwin's book explores issues arising from tensions within practice. He recognizes, for example, that information and communication technologies (ICT's) expand the possibilities of library service. A new generation of librarians is creating Library 2.0, "remaking the profession from the ground up for the digital future" according to their own vision of professional imperatives and in response to demands from a new generation of library users. These practices are based on active sharing of information and interactive personalized service, transforming the library into a medium of communication. It's important to remember that Library Juice began its life as a web-based publication and continues today as a blog (see http://libraryjuicepress.com/blog/). Litwin believes in an activist librarianship that will protect citizens' rights to information and extend library service in new ways to new audiences. Blogs, social networking and the web itself, however, are just tools. They are means to ends rather than ends in themselves and care must be taken so that librarians use rather than are used by them.

Litwin rejects the notion that all technology is automatically good and that librarians who cannot see this are somehow misguided. He argues that librarians should not identify themselves as "information professionals" because it too easily leads to a focus on "neo-information": digital, undifferentiated, decontextualized content unconnected to any genuine human project. Neo-information and the ICT that supports it substitute commodity fetishism for relevance, threatening both privacy and individual intellectual autonomy. These consequences serve an information environment dominated by interests of private property whose goal is the manipulation of human need for commercial and political ends. Litwin asserts that librarianship must be about using information to maintain connections with reality and authentic existence; that it must be based on the truthful assessment of the patron's real needs and must situate retrieved information in the context of available information. The end of librarianship is not about librarians; it is about the "enrichment, enlightenment and empowerment" of patrons.

To accomplish this end libraries and librarianship need to change in order to connect more intimately with human needs and democratic purposes increasingly conditioned by a Web 2.0 environment. From Litwin's perspective, library practice must work to counter value systems that prize economic gain over any other value. Librarians need to identify and provide alternative information sources. Dominant knowledge hegemonies tend to flatten thought and discourage informed citizenship favoring instead the complacent consumption of information products.

Librarianship has to embrace the political implications of its work but a radical stance for its own sake or for the sake of advancing the self-interest of librarians is not appropriate. The stereotypical librarian, one hesitant to

embrace personal or professional change, can also be seen as a defender of enduring democratic values. Not all change is progressive. Web 2.0 offers possibilities for the democratization of communication but it also can allow unverified assertions to pass for truth. Calls for non-hierarchical, non-power dominated libraries and professional communities such as those made by the anarchist librarian movement of the 90's resonate with democratic ideals and bear careful consideration but Litwin reminds us that standardization, hierarchy, and order are also signs of rational thought and necessary for the discovery of truth. Institutions and authority must earn their legitimacy, but they are necessary to accomplish human ends.

Although intellectual freedom is the explicit topic of only one of the pieces in the book, it is arguably the primary value underlying the critical professional consciousness manifest throughout. Litwin makes a strong point when he observes that ideas are dangerous, the best ideas do not always win in the marketplace of ideas and suppressed ideas do not necessarily gain strength. These conditions make a principled and active commitment to intellectual freedom a primary value of both librarianship and democracy. Problems arise for librarianship, however, because the relationship between intellectual freedom and social responsibility is not free of ambiguity. This problem is well illustrated by the selection of pieces on Cuba. Litwin writes that the book would have retained its coherence if this section had been omitted and that he chose to include it for historical reasons. On the contrary, I think that this section is crucial to the book and reveals contradictions within the library left that it has yet to address.

Rhonda Neugebauer and Ann Sparanese, for example, offer critiques of the so-called independent libraries in Cuba, as well as the organization, Friends of Cuban Libraries, based in Miami. Both are seen as parts of a strategy orchestrated by the U.S. government to destabilize the Cuban government. Contacts and efforts by American librarians to provide aid to Cuban state librarians are documented as evidence of taking a genuine socially responsible professional position in the face of unjust American foreign policy toward Cuba. Sparanese recognizes that the conditions of free speech in Cuba are less than desirable but asks "Can we realistically expect and demand that Cuba be the model of democratic rights in the face of the unrelenting U.S. economic and political aggression?"

Given Cuba's relative powerlessness regarding its relations with both the U.S. and the former Soviet Union, its role as a pawn in the Cold War, and American efforts at economic isolation if not regime change in Cuba, distortions of social democratic revolutionary ideals are understandable. If after 45 years, however, the transition from a dictatorship of the proletariat to genuine collective self-rule is still waiting, then it is fair to ask if something has gone wrong with the revolution. Some of the voices suppressed in Cuba are those of critical socialists who justifiably expect more from their revolution.

If justice is the goal of librarianship the Cuban situation presents an illustrative and complex practical problem requiring a theoretical analysis missing from professional discourse. This problem engages the professional tensions explored throughout Litwin's book. The founding principles of librarianship certainly include a libertarian commitment to individual rights and intellectual freedom as well as a communitarian commitment to social responsibility and justice. The *a priori* application of absolute principle in professional discourse, however, provides little guidance for the resolution of conflicts between actual individual and collective interests. Politically wise as well as moral choice requires that we adequately theorize practical situations. For example, is it possible to support independent Cuban libraries as a matter of intellectual freedom and Cuban state libraries as a matter of social responsibility, or is this contradiction essentially irresolvable? What do we need to know to answer this question?

Litwin's book does a good job at raising important questions like these. Everyday, librarians confront practical situations that demand theoretical and moral analysis. Everyday they are called upon to resolve tensions between the need to effectively use ICT and avoid its totalizing implications; between the need to conserve democratic traditions of library purpose and use while committing to the social activism implied by the nature of library practice; between a concept of intellectual freedom that does not allow neutrality to subvert the social responsibility that informs the principle and a concept of social responsibility that does not subvert the end of justice by using it to justify means inimical to personal freedom. Reading Litwin's book is a good way to begin thinking about these issues.