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New Librarianship

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NEW LIBRARIANSHIP

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Lankes gave a rousing opening plenary on the future of librarianship, with a humorous and evangelistic tone, and an enthusiastic audience response. He began by declaring, "The best days of librarianship are ahead of us. The golden age...is coming soon, and it will last a long time. We are the right profession, uniquely positioned to lead in the Knowledge Age. However, we won't get there following current trends and with our current focus on 'recorded knowledge.' We need a new librarianship," focusing not on artifacts but on knowledge and conversation; and "dedicated to social action, leadership, and innovation."

Noting the media narrative about growing use of public libraries, he pointed out that the increase began not "when the economy sank," but in the mid-1990's with the advent of the Internet. Since then, Wikipedia and MySpace have put Encarta and Geocities out of business (my own interpretation of his graphs).

Apart from the question of the future of libraries, Lankes says the better question is, "What should be the future of libraries and librarians in a democracy?"

Using an image of Uluru/Ayers Rock to illustrate his claim that "There's no such thing as recorded knowledge," he said that the rock itself contains no knowledge, but that the people observing it bring the knowledge, and it might take geological, anthropological, or other forms. "Its not in the rock! It's in me!"

Knowledge is created through conversation," Lankes explained. In an overview of conversation theory, he noted that conversants (people, not books) exchange language, seek agreements, and have dynamic and relational memories. The mission of librarians, he said, is to improve society through facilitating knowledge creation (i.e., conversation) in their communities. We do this through our core values of service, leadership, and innovation. As one audience member pointed out, the same mission could apply to publishers. In his response, Lankes said that we should all ~~do~~ what the user wants, but only if it's for the good of society."

The full screencast, entertaining and inspiring, is available to view and share at <http://quartz.syr.edu/rdlankes/blog/?p=854>.