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## ATG Interviews Katherine Skinner, Executive Director, Educopia Institute

Katina Strauch

*Against the Grain*, [kstrauch@comcast.net](mailto:kstrauch@comcast.net)

Tom Gilson

*College of Charleston*, [gilsont@cofc.edu](mailto:gilsont@cofc.edu)

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**Interview — Don Beagle**  
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**DB:** A couple poet-friends roughly my age — **Frances Pearce** of Charleston and **Ralph Earle** of Raleigh — both published well-received small-press chapbooks in 2016. A small press chapbook (generally 47 pages or fewer) has become a fairly typical format for many new poets' first collections. So I started sorting out a subset of 45 pages from my larger manuscript, planning to follow the same path to submitting a small-press chapbook. But at a **Charleston Conference** presentation I learned about this new academic imprint, **Library Partners Press**, established at **Z. Smith Reynolds Library at Wake Forest University**. My interest was sparked, of course, when Editor **William Kane** announced his desire to do some poetry collections. So I returned to the full-length version of my manuscript and sent it in. But I must stress, my poems had already won multiple academic awards, and had been published in recognized journals from *Carolina Quarterly* in the south to *Lake Superior Review* in the north; from *Agora* on the east coast to *Blue Unicorn* on the west coast. I just feel extraordinarily fortunate to have my first collection issued as a full-length book from an academic press at a major university. It seems a perfect fit, since I've been directing academic libraries for 20 years, and a tenured full professor for a decade.

**BT:** So having spent 20 years on the faculty at a Catholic Benedictine college, **Belmont Abbey College**, has that impacted your poetry, either in form or content?

**DB:** Very much so. I would say that numerous poems in **WHAT MUST ARISE** are examples of a poet "in dialogue with" or "in conversation with" Catholicism, rather than being attempts to write "Catholic poetry" *per se*. In some poems, such as "The Shroud" and "St. Someone," these conversations are direct and central. In other poems, such as "The Stone," "Mr. Paley and the Pocket Watch," and "Hypatia Comes to Chapel Hill," historical and socio-cultural aspects of Catholic (and Anglican) faith form a more general backdrop against which these poems unfold as lyric narratives. For example, "The Stone" personifies and interrogates certain imagery and symbols from **Ingmar Bergman's** famous film, *The Seventh Seal*. The film, of course, concerns a crusader knight, Antonius Block, who returns from the Holy Land only to see his faith tested by the plague ravaging his homeland. And my poem "Mr. Paley and the Pocket Watch," was developed by reading the arguments made by advocates of so-called "intelligent design," especially **Phillip E. Johnson's** text in *First Things*. Reading **Johnson's** argument (after he once lectured here at **Belmont Abbey College**) made me go back and read the original "Watchmaker" essay by **William Paley**. After reading **Paley**,

I reached a startling realization: my academic research into information science and related aspects of complexity theory forced me to the conclusion that **Paley's** entire "Watchmaker" argument (or analogy) is, in point of fact, a *logical fallacy*. Not only that, but it is a *self-negating* logical fallacy, and I believe I can prove that in a series of forthcoming articles. But unlike **Richard Dawkins**, who as an atheist, attacked **Paley** and **Johnson** in his book, *The Blind Watchmaker*, my critique of **Paley** and **Johnson** stands untroubled by my own position as a theist — a believer in God. The crucial difference happens to be that my theism is based entirely on personal faith, and a belief that faith and reason can ultimately find common ground, without the (to me) theoretically dubious apparatus of the "Watchmaker" analogy, or misguided attempts to position "intelligent design" as its would-be successor. 🍷

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**Editor's Note:** Don's book *What Must Arise* has been posted on ATG's "Books from Our Crowd" at: <http://www.against-the-grain.com/bfoc/>. "Books from Our Crowd" is our way of helping to promote books written and produced by those of you who are part of the ATG and Charleston Conference community. Feel free to check it out, and "submit your book." — **KS**

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## ATG Interviews Katherine Skinner

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### Executive Director, Educopia Institute

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by **Tom Gilson** (Associate Editor, *Against the Grain*) <[gilsont@cofc.edu](mailto:gilsont@cofc.edu)>

and **Katina Strauch** (Editor, *Against the Grain*) <[kstrauch@comcast.net](mailto:kstrauch@comcast.net)>

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**ATG:** *Katherine, some of our readers might not know much about the Educopia Institute. Can you tell us a little bit about Educopia? What is your mission?*

**KS:** **Educopia** was founded in 2006 as a nonprofit, 501(c)3 organization. The founders' vision was to create a nimble, efficient, and lean mechanism for catalyzing multi-institution, community-driven work in scholarly communications and digital preservation. **Educopia's** mission is to build networks and collaborative communities to help cultural, scientific, and scholarly institutions achieve greater impact.

We foster collaborative work across professionals from libraries, archives, museums, presses, and research centers. We try to break down stakeholder silos and encourage these groups to find ways to work together to achieve our common goals in knowledge diffusion and dissemination.

**ATG:** *Who were the founders and are they still involved? How did they come up with the name? Is there a story behind it?*

**KS:** Our founders are **Dr. Martin Halbert** (Dean of Libraries, **University of North Texas**), **Dr. Tyler Walters** (Dean of Libraries, **Virginia Tech**), **David Seaman** (Dean of Libraries, **Syracuse University**), **Rachael Bower** (Director, SCOUT project, **University of Wisconsin**), and **Greg Crane** (Director, Perseus Project, **Tufts University**). Their goal was to make possible extended collaborations between libraries, research centers, archives, and museums. So often, projects find themselves limited to grant-funded timeframes, and transitioning from project to ongoing program is extremely challenging. We wanted to help multi-institution projects shift from collaborative action (often trapped in a grant-funded, time-bound environment) to collective impact (longer term, sustained engagement that yields system-level results).

**ATG:** *Above you defined Educopia as "nimble, efficient and lean." What does that mean exactly? Can you give us examples? What trade offs are required to keep Educopia operating this way?*

**KS:** Simply put, it means we keep the "center" of our organization small and inexpensive by design. Our efforts are focused on empowering and incentivizing distributed networks to learn, build, and share with each other. That's very different from the traditional 501c3 model in our field, which usually builds infrastructure, services, and content that is held by the 501c3 and sold back to members. We don't want libraries, archives, publishers, and museums to be dependent on **Educopia**; we want to embed knowledge and activity back where it belongs — within those libraries, archives, publishers, and museums. There really is no trade-off in this operation style for us — we're mission driven at our core, and that mission demands that our core be nimble, efficient, and lean.

**ATG:** *We know from what you said earlier and from reading your mission statement that Educopia partners with diverse stakeholders and builds networks. But other than digital preservation, are there particular*

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*areas within scholarly communication that you focus on?*

**KS:** Yes! We work on a broad range of issues, including library publishing (still a growing set of stakeholders and successes, and one that is increasingly networked into other publisher communities including university presses), publishing analytics (the ethics of and mechanisms for gathering and storing and providing access to user data about publications), and sustaining digital publications (e.g., building a vertically integrated research alliance model for topical areas like “coerced migration” to bridge many resources created in multiple institutional contexts). We are also working with several budding communities that are testing their feasibility, like the Digital Liberal Arts exchange (DLAx), which would provide a way for institutions to share staffing to increase their local capacities.

**ATG:** *We know that Library Publishing Coalition (LPC) was founded with seed support from the Educopia Institute. Are you still involved? If so, can you give us a status report?*

**KS:** Educopia began working with the LPC when it was just a shared idea among a few library publishers. In 2011, we helped that group of library publishers to raise seed support from the extended library community and between 2012-13, we helped to instantiate the shared vision of 60 institutions. I am still personally involved and love the work that the LPC community is accomplishing! Its membership has created a culture of sharing and learning that encompasses the much broader set of stakeholders that are involved in that work — including university presses, scholars, technologists, and service providers. The upcoming Library Publishing Forum this March in Baltimore is a great example of their work — the theme this year highlights both innovation and intersection, and it looks at the way collaborative endeavors are enabling new processes, forms, and voices in scholarly communications.

**ATG:** *You are also part of the BitCurator Consortium and the MetaArchive Cooperative. Can you tell us about those efforts?*

**KS:** Educopia has helped to incubate both the BitCurator Consortium and MetaArchive Cooperative through our Affiliated Community program.

The BitCurator Consortium is a thriving community of research libraries and archives that supports digital forensics practices in libraries, archives and museums. This community researches and develops open source tools and practices for digital forensics, fostering born-digital content curation practices. As a tangible example, think about the author **Salman Rushdie** and his archive at **Emory University**. **Rushdie** needed great portability for his writing devices due to the *fatwa*, or death sentence, that was proclaimed on him after *The Satanic Verses* was published. He became one of the earliest authors to rely on

digital technologies and computers. When **Emory** acquired his archives, the collection included a ton of *digital* content — including files on very old Macintosh computers. In order to process such content, archivists use digital forensics tools — the same types of tools used in criminal investigations — to ensure that they can effectively appraise and extract content thoroughly from old devices before those become obsolete, and also capture important information about the types, numbers, and sizes of files acquired.

The MetaArchive Cooperative, now in its 13th year (!), continues to unite research libraries, public libraries, and museums focused on distributed digital preservation. Through the MetaArchive repository, this community preserves content on behalf of over 60 institutions in the Americas and Europe. What makes it awesome, though, is the member engagement in this community — which includes libraries, archives, and museums. Digital preservation is a dense, complex, multifaceted undertaking, one that doesn’t have one simple answer or solution. Our members share their workflows, challenges, successes, and learning with each other, and in doing so, they help each other continue to grow and mature on the preservation spectrum.

**ATG:** *All of this project and community involvement requires resources. Where does Educopia get its support? Grants? Memberships? Subscriptions? Other?*

**KS:** Our resources and support come through a range of revenue streams including memberships and consulting contracts. We also conduct a range of research, and that work is funded by several grant programs.

**ATG:** *There are a number of worthy projects out there. How does Educopia decide what to support and how much to allocate to them? Do you set time frames for a project to produce results?*

**KS:** Great question...we have a strong board presence, and that helps tremendously! Our board includes library deans, a state library director, a university press director, and their perspectives and input drives much of our work. We also have a strong portfolio approach that helps us to identify appropriate projects/communities and then structure their experiences with us so that they have solid progress measurements they can track with us to see how their maturation process is going. That includes measurements that can help us recognize when a community is ready for a sun-setting process — and we see that as a positive moment, not as a failure.

**ATG:** *During your plenary at the 2015 Charleston Conference you said the libraries should assert a leadership role in digital preservation. Have you seen any evidence that libraries are taking up your challenge?*

**KS:** Yes! Libraries are crucial digital preservation leaders. I’ll point to one really important moment and initiative from this year that received the press attention it deserved. The “End of Term” crawl team — which includes folks from the **University of North Texas**,

**California Digital Library**, **Internet Archive**, **Library of Congress**, and the **U.S. Government Publishing Office** — took action in 2008 to begin capturing and preserving U.S. government websites at the end of presidential administrations. It’s a phenomenal undertaking, and it has drawn the public’s attention this year, during this particularly fraught political shift, to the need to collect and keep this kind of evidence available to researchers of all types over time. Our history is now largely digital, and no one knows more right now about how to care for the digital lifecycle than libraries do. One of the really positive signs I’ve seen at a system level in the last year (since **Charleston Conference 2015**) is the significant growth in the number of research and public libraries that are undertaking such important work.

**ATG:** *You also said that publishing was undergoing a system-wide transformation and that rather than focusing on institutional concerns, the scholarly publishing community should be building bridges across relevant players. Have we made any progress on that front? What can libraries do as part of that bridge building effort?*

**KS:** We’ve made a lot of progress on that front, and we need to make more. One of the pathways we’ve been encouraging at **Educopia** is a kind of “bridge the bridges” undertaking. There are a lot of multi-stakeholder alliances that are striving for system-level change in scholarly communications. Some communities have been around for years, like **SPARC**, **Research Data Alliance**, and **FORCE**; others are just emerging, like the **Open Scholarship Initiative**. These multi-stakeholder alliances are powerful change-mechanisms in their own right; I suspect they could move faster and more fluidly if they began to align their work, deliberately, towards shared goals. An informal group has been discussing how best to forge such alignment across multi-stakeholder communities. I see this as a really positive step in the right direction. Libraries have a crucial role in such bridge-building as they have a unique perspective regarding not just the dissemination, but also the longevity and sustainability of scholarly content. Their voices and perspectives are very important in the discussions that are happening.

**ATG:** *Your website says that Educopia provides a suite of program development services for community-led efforts. What does that mean exactly? Which of your current projects have evolved from these efforts?*

**KS:** Great question! We provide incubation services for communities that are trying to mature from “start-up” or “project” mode into ongoing programs or entities. We saw the kind of “valley of death” that so many grant-funded and short term initiatives experience when they try to sustain the great work they start in a project. My research background is focused on organizational formation and transformation, and much of the work we have done to help the MetaArchive Cooperative, the Library Publishing Coalition, and the BitCurator Consortium to thrive is now being leveraged to help other communities. We work with a range of projects

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that are exploring sustainability scenarios and establishing governance systems and revenue models. For example, we're currently working with the Software Preservation Network to help this group to instantiate strong community and business models to support ongoing community-driven work.

**ATG:** *In his plenary session, at this year's Charleston Conference James G. Neal, incoming President of ALA, said that by 2026 there will be no information and services industry targeting products to the library marketplace. Content and applications will be directed to the consumer. Do you see a similar future? Where do you see the scholarly publishing community in ten years?*

**KS:** I agree with **Jim Neal** that products are increasingly directed at consumers rather than at libraries. As for what that will mean in ten years... there are just so many variables at play. It is harder to predict right now what the impact of that trend will be on scholarly communications and its many producers. Higher education is under fire in many environments, both public and private. I think the *response* of higher education — meaning faculty and administrators and students and librarians and technologists and university publishers — to the still-increasing privatization of knowledge dissemination channels is something to watch closely.

Scholars and publishers and administrators have the opportunity right now to demonstrate our values and expand our “market” through championing a more open discourse and knowledge diffusion network that stretches well beyond the so-called “Ivory Tower.” That could be a game changer. I am convinced that a lot of what we produce in the Academy could

travel further and bear positive influence on our society and culture. If we miss that opportunity and if our scholarly communications continue to be trapped mostly within the academy, we will miss a crucial opportunity to reach a broader public with the research we produce.

**ATG:** *If you were sitting in our place conducting this interview, what question would you ask yourself?*

**KS:** I would ask myself “What do you think the future holds for communities, consortia, and nonprofits in scholarly communications? Where can they have the best impact?” That's the question I wish more folks were asking.

I keep hearing thought leaders in the field saying that there are too many consortia, nonprofits, and membership communities in the library and information space, that we should centralize those, investing in one or two rather than supporting so many different approaches and groups. Looking at the system through an organizational modeling lens, I have to disagree. Centralization has rarely done good things for the library or for knowledge dispersion. Centralized agencies tend to be top heavy and expensive to run; they also tend to be both slow and steady. They're great forces to have in a field, as long as they're complimented by dispersed, diffuse approaches and voices that enable community-driven innovations to emerge and thrive. But focusing on centralization leads to a drop in diversification. It also yields stagnation and can hinder innovation, as we can see in so many other fields. There's simply a limit to how many voices can speak and be heard in a centralized, large setting. Smaller communities have the ability to encourage and grow lots of leaders, lots of innovators. They are incredibly valuable tools within our field.

I think that right now, we have lots of artificial barriers between institutions that need to

be broken down, and I see community-driven consortia and nonprofits as key in this work. Regional consortia, for example, often pull together a wide range of players — libraries of different sizes and focuses that happen to be geographically co-located. That can be tremendously powerful in breaking down silos and ensuring that the solutions we build take the needs of the whole system into account. For example, in digital preservation, if you have only research libraries collaborating, you run the risk of building digital preservation solutions that only account for the research library community, neglecting the sheer volume of content dispersed in all of the smaller, less resourced institutions. I think that achieving scale in something like digital preservation requires us to think past our narrow concept of who our peers are and work together across boundaries of rank and size and shape and form. Regional associations and networks provide a powerful apparatus for that kind of exploration, relationship building, and work together across institutions of different sizes and shapes.

**ATG:** *We always like to end our interviews on a personal note so we were wondering what you like to do for fun during your down time. Do you have any activities you particularly enjoy? Do you have any personal recommendations that you like to share about the best book you've read lately, or the best movie you've seen recently?*

**KS:** Honestly, reading to my kiddos is my absolute favorite thing to do right now. **Gabe** is eight and **Wes** is almost six, and we just finished the first three *Harry Potter* books and just started a **Diane Wynne Jones** novel. I cannot WAIT until they're old enough for the *Chrestomanci Quartet!* There really is nothing better this winter than to declare “let's read a chapter” and have those two jump into the couch and snuggle up beside me. 🐾

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## Blurring Lines — Discovering Black Quotidian and Impacting the Learner: An Interview with Matt Delmont

Column Editor: **David Parker** (Video Licensing and Distribution, Alexander Street/ProQuest; Phone: 201-673-8784) <[dparker@alexanderstreet.com](mailto:dparker@alexanderstreet.com)> Follow me on Twitter @theblurringline



I met **Matt Delmont** during a presentation he gave at the **ProQuest** offices in Ann Arbor, Michigan in the summer of 2016. **Matt** is a professor of history at **Arizona State University**: <https://mattdelmont.com/> **Matt's** presentation centered around the role of historical newspapers and the telling of histories less commonly known or told. His website, *Black Quotidian*: <http://blackquotidian.com/amvc/black-quotidian/index> focuses on everyday stories with daily entries selected at **Matt's** discretion.

Over the past year I have been increasingly curious (obsessed?) with efforts by my team at **Alexander Street** and others across the world of education and scholarship to measure the impact of video in particular, but other media as well. We track page views, time on page, device used for viewing, referring urls, most popular titles, etc. But how do we know when a video or image has been shown in class to hundreds of students? How do we know when an article has changed the course of a person's educational path? How do we know when

a student watches a video before a test and performs significantly better? I am obsessed with this line of questioning at this moment in time because I see libraries and librarians increasingly using cost-per-view and raw usage data as a measure of the “return on investment.” I believe we need to present other data points alongside usage data to explore the impact of content on the learner.

**Matt's** work on *Black Quotidian* struck me as a perfect foil to explore this question of

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