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Lost in Austin

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Leaving the Books Behind

by Mary E. (Tinker) Massey (University of South Carolina, School of Library and Information Science, Columbia, SC) <MMassey@gwm.sc.edu>

Dr. Felli Tu, my professor at USC in Research, recently told me about a book she felt I must read. The reference was to Sherry Turkle's The Second Self, published in 1984 by Simon and Shuster. I was unsure why this particular recommendation had been made to me until I curled up with the book after the final class and papers were completed. This text examines the culture of and created by the advent of the computer. Dr. Turkle actually looks at how the computer has influenced our lives and changed our psyches forever.

Machines have always influenced our lives, giving us more leisure time to do things of pleasure or waste. I don't remember ever reading a book about how people react to a "thinking" machine and how it enhances or changes the way you think, act and express on a daily basis. She calls the computer a "catalyst of culture formation." We are combining and recombining into groups of intense interests. We seek answers to problems and seek new ways of dealing with information, people, and processes. It has been a rebirth of the sixties, an intense intellectual examination era. Our new horizons soar to thoughts of "knowledge cooperatives" instead of "food cooperatives." We now think of computers as not only a means to an end, but a mind expanding way to visualize life and all of its reiterative difficulties.

I often wondered why I never fit into any particular group or discipline. Recently, I have understood that my mind flits about the world like a butterfly looking for a tidbit of information here and a bit of data there and sampling the world's crops of knowledge. Slowly, my mind pieces together those bits of information into reasonable streams of sensible answers for specific problems. Not only do I find the current difficulties solvable, but there are insinuations for further exploration along those lines. The computer lessens the barriers of my thoughts and allows it to explore so many problems and solutions and eventually contains even the stray ideas tossed in the air. I feel emancipated...free to think and feel and believe again.

About six years ago, I had a small stroke. All I could do was sit there and feel ineptitude ooze across my mind like a veil of darkness. I could no longer read English and understand it. The page was a series of printed symbols which no longer held meaning. At first I panicked, then lapsed into immediate depression, then became pensive about where we go from here. I was able to obtain a computer through the generosity of a merchant and began a systematic rehabilitation based on the computer, its thought patterns and its games. I was fool, therapist and patient in one, but I made very rapid improvement and began to read again. I had this kind of internal understanding, but expression of those thoughts took longer to achieve. Three years later, I was able to make my way hesitantly into Graduate School. I was eager to learn. I could finally understand my passion for information research and my ability to translate that knowledge to the general public. I have a gift that I would not have understood without my daily conversations with the computer. The "thinking machine" provides me with an ability to examine all the situations around me, re-associate their meanings and parameters and come to some very original ideas that can help our library and perhaps those of the future.

The computer allows us to find our strengths and correct our weaknesses. It allows us the ability to explore all ideas, even those that seem strange or off-the-wall. It supports our adventures even when people around us do not. I remember buying my first computer. Well, actually, my husband bought it because he had a fascination for mechanical devices. I found it an immediate intrusion on my life, a competitor for my husband's attentions. I stroked it every day but kept my distance. One day, I sat down, turned it on, and began a communion that has intensified each day of my life. Sometimes I believe it is the machine which puts life in my fingers. Perhaps, it is because I have been a person reliant on touching and feeling the words and sounds of life, that this computer has enhanced the ability to once again communicate my unbound thoughts. Poetry flows with a power that impresses. Fiction seems to run from my fingertips with each touch of the keys. And now, I am able to conjure process changes for work and develop lists of routine instructions that actually make sense.

I cannot even begin to think about my library work without the computer. Yes, I remember the "good ole days" of card catalogs, manual typewriters, scrapers, electric erasers, embossers, pens, pencils, rulers, and even the first days of photocopying. I remember the labor intensive days which never allowed the freedom to spend time wondering about call number construction and subject headings, or the variety of serials problems. We would not have the opportunity to set up electronic preprint libraries, worry about vendors and publishers from our technical services perspective, or even track the changes in the field. The computer has indeed matched us up in a charismatic and fruitful combination of needs and services that will carry us to the Charleston Conference and other meetings throughout the year to seek advice and share information. Yes, our "information cooperative" is unique and wonderful and services millions each day. For as much as I observe people utilizing the computer as a mindless machine doing the business of the day, I see our group observing, gathering information, and carrying the burden of remembering the "mindful coordination of parts and thoughts" for the higher purposes of resolve and culture manipulation.

We have important and unique tasks to complete and do so with the teamwork of the best software and hardware possible in this new age of knowledge expansion. We will work hard to see that it continues in this manner.

Lost in Austin

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On April 17, 2004, I released another book at another airport. My first release was on March 15, 2004 at the Will Rogers World Airport and the book was The Poorhouse Fair by John Updike. The second book, released on April 17 was Self-Consciousness: Memoir, also by John Updike. I left it at Gate 23 at 10:30 a.m. at the Austin-Bergstrom International Airport.

Why Updike? I didn't start out to make a statement about him but already have, but before I talk more about Updike, I should satisfy your curiosity and explain what I do when I release a book.

The first thing is to select a book, probably a paperback that I have read and perhaps re-read and appreciated the book enough to want to share it. Next I go to www.bookcrossing.com where I register the book and watch with pleasure as a photograph of the very book in my hand appears on the screen. One day I am going to register one that is out of print and without an ISBN to see what happens.

After I register the book, I download (Adobe) a copy of the bookmark/release statement. In marked spaces, I write the book and cross identification number BCID and my name and the date of registration. This form is pasted inside the front cover of the book. In Oklahoma continued on page 88
Little Red Herrings — PASCAL

by Mark Y. Herring (Dean of Library Services, Dacus Library, Winthrop University) <herrimg@winthrop.edu>

PASCAL. It has nothing to do with the famous French philosopher. It has nothing to do with a computer language. But in terms of academic libraries in South Carolina, it may be more important than either.

Surely by now you’ve heard of it? Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries is the brainchild of South Carolina academic librarians; and if the infant survives, it will become the braintrust of South Carolina’s public and private academic libraries resource sharing collaborative. For PASCAL has to do with technology on the one hand and a philosophy of broad-based library service on the other.

Sharing is, of course, not new to South Carolina academic librarians. We’ve been sharing for decades now. We have to. It’s the nature of library services to do that sort of thing. We borrow from each other because budgets are tight and needs are great. Decades ago South Carolina academic librarians began sharing resources and expertise. And just about anything else you can think of, whether nailed down or not. Two groups, the Library Directors’ Forum (consisting largely of academic librarians at publicly supported institutions) and the Library Directors Council (consisting of members of the South Carolina Independent Colleges and Universities), worked together for years but asymptotically; always approaching, but never quite reaching, a full-service joint venture. Then something novel occurred.

The two groups got together and made sharing our paramount concern. Academic directors and deans from both the public and private universities of South Carolina’s university and college libraries put their heads together and, like Athena from the head of Zeus, PASCAL was born. Patterned after such services in other states’ Virginia’s VIVA, Georgia’s GALILEO, Missouri’s MOBIUS and Kentucky’s KYVL — PASCAL will eventually become South Carolina’s statewide consortium. Pressing its three major programs — Consortial Purchasing (via either individual initiatives or umbrella-like operations such as DISCUS-Academic), Universal Borrowing and Digitization — PASCAL is rapidly becoming a veritable universe of services and will eventually become the statewide consortia.

Statewide funding is critical in order for PASCAL to become as fully viable as statewide consortia in other states. For example, Virginia’s VIVA recently reported a cost avoidance of 103 million (see: http://www.viva.lib.va.us/viva/outreach/releases/20023102.html). Indeed, if funding from South Carolina’s educational lottery can be secured, South Carolina’s academic libraries would see their budget buying power increase 4 to 10 times! It only makes sense. Instead of dozens of South Carolina academic libraries (potentially 54 in all) buying the same half dozen databases, why not a statewide consortium buy one for all?

By the time you read these words, we’ll know if PASCAL made it through the budget process. The Senate Finance Committee has already approved lottery dollars for PASCAL, and we loudly applaud its foresight. Now it moves to the larger legislature. This is a critical time for PASCAL. We look to the larger legislature to see this important step for what it is: information access for all. Legislatures in other states have seen the merit of such cooperatives and funded them to the benefit of all their constituencies. Those constituencies have not been disappointed, and neither have their representatives. How could they be with millions in cost avoidance, access to information statewide and greater learning for all? We know Palmetto legislators know a good thing when they see it. Surely they will agree with us that this is a good thing to do for this great state and its citizens. And doing it from the educational lottery funds only makes sense.

Meanwhile, are academic librarians just waiting around for someone else to act? Heaven’s no. In fact, the state’s academic li...continued on page 89