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Op Ed — A Digital Artifact Cannot Replace the Original

by **Susan Klimley** (Serials Collection and Electronic Resources Librarian, Columbia University Health Sciences Library) <klimley@columbia.edu>



I recently re-read **Matthew Bruccoli**'s presentation at the **Charleston Conference** which I heard last fall. When he spoke, I remember distinctively thinking that **Dr. Bruccoli** was everything that blackboard or computerized instruction will never be — a great teacher with emotion and cadence in his voice and a point about the digital library that can hardly be dismissed. A digital artifact cannot replace the original.

The unique reality of a university book was even more strongly impressed on me when I had to borrow a book to read for a class in color theory that I was taking last semester. Like many librarians, I usually buy the books I want. As a youth I was sent to the library for books I needed. I relish the idea of ownership and as a rule I have little restraint when it comes to books. In the case of **Faber Birren**'s *1978 Color and Human Response*, the book wasn't in my local bookstore and getting it via **Amazon.com** is never much fun. The **Columbia** copy was located in the non-circulating **Avery** collection but I was pleased to find I could use our "borrow direct" system to get a loan from another of the Ivies.

The book arrived quickly with its wide, green paper band around the cover. The first thing I noticed was the text block was completely broken, and the two halves of the book were held together by the cover on the outside and a few paper links over the break. I wondered briefly if I should have someone sign off that I didn't break the book but I put that off and started to read. It was an interesting free-wheeling book. **Birren** was interested in hallucinogenic drugs especially LSD and its effect on color perception, skin sensation of color and people's color aura, but he didn't seem enthusiastic about biofeedback and meditation. How things change.

Predictably, the book had a section of plates, most in black and white, probably a result of cost. Less predictable were the black and white line illustrations at the front of each chapter. Some made sense: The man standing in front of a group of eyes at the front of a chapter titled "Visual Response;" and the painter in front of his easel at the start of "Aesthetic Response." But the man on his bended knees under the barred window in a stone wall, for "To Calm the Mind?"

The book was sporadically underlined but the text was engaging and although I wished that the underlines had

been less sloppy, I mentally edited out the pencil marks. When I finished the text, I looked through the bibliography and for some reason the underlinings and notes got my attention. It appeared that multiple people annotated the bibliography. Some of them underlined and put stars next to titles. A number of the underlines had question marks, while others had notes like "interesting." I found myself trying to see what the pattern was, without success. What were the readers looking for? Why were some titles clearly of interest and others noted with a question mark?

At the end, I flipped to the back cover where there was a book pocket, charge cards and date stamps. The book had been checked out as soon as it had been received and had an active circulation. The librarian voyeur in me checked the charges: On the new book shelf in October, 1978, and then regularly checked out; one person renewing repeatedly, then in and out with various patrons, an occasional overdue notation and a couple of stints on reserve. Different people, sometimes a repeat customer. The privacy librarian in me noted that these handwritten circulation notations would be expunged on the basis of potential breach of confidentiality. The saving grace for these borrowers was that their cribbed handwriting made it barely possible to read the names. Then in 2004 the date stamps cease.

What an interesting life this aca-

demic book has had. I truly had a sense of being part of a long line of users of this text. It isn't a rare book. It isn't a particularly old book. It is a noteworthy book in color theory but not a great book. But its shared life is clearly recorded in this particular copy.

The *New York Times* recently had an article about the latest eBook reader. Apparently the technology is getting closer to something people will actually use. But one of the reporter's comments was that the typeface for all of the books he downloaded was the same. Nothing distinguished one book from another. When he read, he couldn't tell where he was based on the thickness of pages moving from one side to the other with progress. The experience was cool, clean, without personality. Which brings me back to **Dr. Bruccoli**. The book as an object — and not even a unique object — has a personality independent of its text. And when the book is used by many people, each one adds a bit of wear and notations capturing a variety of people's interactions with the book. It makes me glad to be employed by an institution that will give me access to more old books than I will ever have the opportunity to read. It makes me sad that not everyone will have the same access and adventure. 🍂

Rumors. from page 42

libraries (most academic libraries in Washington and Oregon), **WorldCat** and a selection of article citations all through one catalog. Features initially include a single search box, relevancy ranking of search results, result sets that bring multiple versions of a work together, faceted browsing, citation formatting options and cover art. Through a locally branded interface, the service provides libraries the ability to search the entire **WorldCat** database and present results beginning with items most accessible to the user. **WorldCat Local** interoperates with locally maintained services like circulation, resource sharing and resolution to full text.

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www.oclc.org/news/briefs/brief129.htm
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Ed McGettigan, formerly Northeast Sales Representative, and **Philip Taylor**, former Director of Customer Service at **H.W. Wilson** will take on new assignments designed to increase customer contact and support. **Ed McGettigan** will now serve as **National Accounts Manager**. Reporting to **National Sales Manager Nancy Kolady**, **Mr. McGettigan** will assist in coordinating the overall field sales effort. **Mr. McGettigan** holds a degree in journalism from **Moravian College** (Bethlehem, PA). **Philip Taylor** assumes the position of **Director of Sales Support**. Reporting to the fantabulous **Deborah Loeding**, Vice-President of Sales and Marketing, **Mr. Taylor** will manage **Wilson's** technical support, Inside Sales, circulation management, and other sales administrative functions. He has extensive experience in software development and project management. **Mr. Taylor** is a graduate

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