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Book Reviews -- Monographic Musings

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Book Reviews — Monographic Musings

Column Editor: Debbie Vaughn (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

**Column Editor's Note:** Ahh, spring: how wonderful it is awakening to air that feels fresher, skies that seem bluer, and grass that is greener and softer under your feet. Public radio host Garrison Keillor spoke of the onset of the season in the April Fool’s Day edition of A Prairie Home Companion — “it has arrived!” Of course, A Prairie Home Companion would not exist were it not for the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the public radio network. Jack Mitchell has written an engaging work regarding the inception and growth of the medium entitled Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio.

Interestingly, public radio’s predecessor, educational radio, began producing in the first half of the twentieth century a program called School of the Air, through which programs for public school use were broadcast. Happy reading, everyone! — BV

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Reviewed by Debbie Vaughn (College of Charleston) <vaughnd@cofc.edu>

Jack Mitchell, public radio veteran, offers unparalleled insight into public broadcasting in his book Listener Supported: The Culture and History of Public Radio. Part history and part autobiography, Mitchell’s book forewarns readers of the unavoidable biases in his writing; someone with a symbiotic relationship with public radio, whose values shaped and were shaped by it, understandably might have a difficult time separating subjectivity and objectivity. In essence, Mitchell is the Adam of National Public Radio. He was NPR’s first employee. He “did” the first NPR newscast, wrote its first strategic plan, wrote its first standards and practices document, and served as the first permanent producer of NPR’s seminal program, “All Things Considered” (x). So it is only fitting that someone so intimate with the development of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting and the birth and growth of NPR should record his corporate knowledge. Mitchell’s account is divided into 13 chapters which are parcelled into three sections: “Dreams,” “Reality,” and “Critics.” A summative conclusion, notes, bibliography, and index are included.

In the first chapter, “The Progressives,” Mitchell explores the historical footings of publicly-supported, not-for-profit news media. He likens the birth of listener-supported media to the progressives of the early twentieth century, recalling John Dewey’s stance that the media should champion democracy. Fast forward a few years and you land in Mitchell’s second chapter, “Pioneers,” in which he outlines the birth of the British Broadcasting Corporation and the struggles to create a similar non-commercial system in the United States through university broadcasting, Pacific stations, and educational radio. Mitchell’s third chapter, “Public Radio,” narrates the medium’s narrow escape from landing on Washington, D.C.’s cutting room floor. At this point, Mitchell’s writing morphs from interesting to passionate as he pays homage to the forefathers of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting — broadcasting, not merely television — and their thankless and unrecognized efforts to get public radio off the ground. “Purpose,” the fourth chapter, recap’s the quest for a mission and vision for NPR and the drive to steer away from elitist notions of “the best” programming (in the same spirit that it is “best” to eat spinach because it nutritious and “good for you”).

Chapters five through 11 probe six of NPR’s mainstays and other...
work, and your environment. Contemplative practices allow us to develop a capacity for deep concentration, usually in silence, to quiet the mind in the midst of the action and distraction that fills everyday life. This state of calm centeredness provides effective stress reduction and can also help address issues of meaning, values, and spirit. Contemplative practices can help people develop greater empathy and communication skills, improve focus and concentration, reduce stress and enhance creativity.

Together, these efforts by scholars, organizations, and many private individuals (who are turning to gardening, yoga, and other contemplative pursuits in droves) suggest a growing realization that we need new practices to cope with a new environment, and that mindfulness or related contemplative practices are the place to begin. The good news is that this is not just your problem; it’s our problem — it’s a problem that we must solve as individuals, yes, but also as a society. While I like to say (somewhat facetiously) that one of the best things about resource management is that it drove me to meditation, it is not in jest that I say I hope others will also feel inspired to take back their moments — after all, moments are all we really have — and use mindfulness practices to find peace and clarity amid the incessant stream of information enveloping us. I hope we will all join the work that has begun to transform our lives so they are as healthy and effective as possible, so we feel rejuvenated and vitalized by the challenges in our work and the vast potential of technology, rather than worn out by its demands.

1. I would like to thank Diane Grover, Electronic Collections Coordinator at University of Washington Libraries, for inspiring this article through a conversation I had with her in July 2005 about how focusing on only one thing at a time, and taking age-
gressive control and discipline in one’s use of e-mail, improves one’s ability to manage resources.

2. Zen can be translated from the Japanese as “con-
templation” or “enlightenment” but is also the
Japanese name for a branch of Mahayana Bud-
dhism that was originally practiced in China. (If
you have the radical trust required of readers of a
collaborative, user-created encyclopedia, see the
wiki/Zen). It should be considered a philosophy,
way of life, or practice; as much or more than a
religion. For Zen and other forms of Buddhism
do not involve worshiping a god; Zen does not
address the question at all.

The phrase “Zen and the art of...” was first used in a
title of a book in 1953 in Eugen Herrigel’s Zen in
the Art of Archery, but was popularized more
broadly by a book that is ironically not directly
about Zen: Robert Pirsig’s Zen and the Art of

Full disclaimer: I am not a Zen Buddhist. I’ve
been studying various Buddhist traditions for a few
years, have been meditating daily for about two
years, and have a strong interest in mindfulness
practices, which have been personally and profes-
sionally helpful to me. I hope I have not distorted
or mistaken the important ideas of Zen herein this
light-hearted attempt to help others find a path
through the thickets of ERM to a more effective
and peaceful life.

And finally, this article is not intended to suggest
that technology is “bad.” It is intended to discuss
how to cope with its incessant demands, which
come along with its great power and potential.

3. According to Jon Kabat-Zinn, a prominent
leader, teacher, and writer about mindfulness,
mindfulness is “our capacity for awareness and
for self-knowledge... cultivated by paying attention... this
attention is developed and refined through a
practice known as mindfulness meditation.” The
famous Zen Buddhist monk and peace activist
Thich Nhat Hanh defines mindfulness as “keeping
one’s consciousness alive to the present real-
ity.” (p. 11, Miracle of Mindfulness — see note num-
ber 5).

4. Richmond, Lewis. Work as a Spiritual Prac-

5. Kabat-Zinn, John. Coming to Our Senses: Healing Ourselves and the World Through Mind-

Kabat-Zinn wrote the widely-read Wherever You Go, There You Are, and is the founding director of the Stress Reduction Clinic and the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Soci-
ety at the Univ. of Massachusetts Medical School.

6. See for example: Sharon Salzberg and Jo-
seph Goldstein, Insight Meditation: A Step by Step
Course on How to Meditate, which offers CDs with
guided breathing and walking meditation exer-
cises, a workbook, and study cards, Boulder, CO:
Sounds True, c2001; also Thich Nhat Hanh’s The
Miracle of Mindfulness: An Introduction to the Prac-

7. Skimming email for a while is not a crazy idea I’ve
come up with on my own. David Levy, the computer
scientist and professor of information at the
University of Washington (quoted extensively here),
told the Chronicle of Higher Ed that he “unplugs[)]
from the Internet one day each week to clear his head.”
(see note #10 for full reference.)


9. See e.g., Louv, Richard. “Nature Deficit,”
p. 70. McGinnis, Marianne, “Outdoor time calms
hyper kids;” Prevention. Extmaus: Mar
2005. Vol. 57, Iss. 3, p. 54; and Michelle Nijhuis,
“Nature’s tonic;” Audubon. New York: Jan/Feb
2005. Vol. 107, Iss. 1; pg. 11.

10. Quotes are taken from “Shogunom’s” summary
of Levy’s LITA closing keynote in the blog on:
“Information and the Quality of Life: Envi-
enmentalism for the Information Age (take 1)”
October 2nd, 2005 at: http://shogunom.org. It is
evident that the single comment on this blog entry
(as of 10/29/05) makes the suggestion that
everyone “Make a daily and a weekly space
for silence and solitude,” and recommends a kind
of mindfulness meditative practice.

11. Young, Jeffrey R. “Knowing When to Log
Off: Wired campuses may be causing ‘information
overload,’” The Chronicle of Higher Education,
42:2.05. See: http://chronicle.com/free/v51/33/33fr03401.htm.

12. See: http://www.contemplativemind.org/