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Pelikan’s Antidisambiguation — “Of Glass, Cloud, Access, Possession, Knowledge, and Privacy…”

Column Editor: Michael P. Pelikan  (Penn State) <mpp10@psu.edu>

My Dad used to say most folks seek not the Fountain of Youth, but rather the Fountain of Eternal Adolescence. What are our attractions, flirtations, restlessness, and cravings for change with technology other than the echoes of the throes of youthful discovery of the mysteries of the hive?

Amidst the recent celebrations, lamentations, and exhortations surrounding the seemingly sudden appearance on the landscape of Google Glass, I’ve been self-satisfied and reassured in the realization that while these devices represent a technological breakthrough, they do not truly bring in anything deeply NEW, rather simply a new form factor for capabilities we’ve had for some time.

I’ve reflected in this column before how, today, the Internet is our encyclopedia, and how, when I was a kid, the Encyclopaedia Britannica was, in effect, my Internet. A directed search, browsing, following cross references and free associations that arose whilst reading — all these activities, these “inquiry models” carried over from the physical format to the electronically accessed format easily and seamlessly.

The extent to which newer forms of access to remote information have become routine, natural habits seems, in hindsight, surprising. Now it feels strange not to have immediate access at the hip to the wide range of information available online. I remember a very early version of a Concise Encyclopedia that fit on an SD card to be read on a Palm PDA. The articles were paragraph length, and their number was limited, but it was a tantalizing glimpse of what was to come.

It all moved to what we now call the Cloud, before it was called the Cloud. The essential operational characteristic is access, not possession. Of course, the libraries were way out in front on this, and wrestled with the conceptual and perceptual dissonance resulting from buying something they would not possess “physically.” ProQuest was the Cloud long before the Cloud, although I guess it’s well to remember the developmental path...