Independent Scholars: An Interim Report

The history of independent scholars has three turning points. Around 1970, the curve for Ph.D. production, going up, crossed the curve for numbers of full-time faculty positions, going down. Around 1980, Ronald Gross helped start local groups and discipline-based national groups of independent scholars. Now, as a new decade approaches, the 'Ph.D. cabdriver' should be laid to rest, and the independent scholar, with or without a Ph.D., should be recognized as a legitimate social type.

Independent scholars are not going away, nor should they. If circumstances influence thought, as much 20th-century scholarship has shown, then scholars who move in a variety of circumstances will enrich thought. For example, though the scholarly work of many independent scholars is indistinguishable from that of university faculty, some are showing more interest than academics in writing books that will be read by non-specialists; in crossing over from one field to another wherever an intellectual problem leads; in studying theology in those fields where theory is now suspect, or returning to empirical observations in fields that have become highly theoretical; and in bringing other innovative values into scholarly work.

No systematic study of this subject has been done. Are there enough independent scholars to bother with? The 1987 Survey of Doctorate Recipients by the National Research Council reveals that 8,410 humanities Ph.D.'s not in the labor force (i.e., dependent on a spouse, retired, independently wealthy, etc.), humanists without a Ph.D. (such as Barbara Tuchman), researchers in non-humanities disciplines, active scholars Continued Page 2

Minneapolis Jews and Employment in the Prewar Era

Photos: Minnesota Historical Society

Plymouth Ave. No. ca. 1944, the heart of Minneapolis' Jewish community.

Jewish filling station attendant, 1931.

The 1930's was a time of national strife. Widespread unemployment contributed to labor unrest as well as to the rise of fascist hate groups, mirroring Hitler's ascendancy in Europe. Minneapolis, Minnesota was not immune to this turmoil and was called "the anti-Semitic capital of the nation" in a national article by Carey McWilliams.

Forum board member Laura Weber looked at this era from the perspective of the Jewish community in an award-winning paper, "Minneapolis Jews and Employment: 1930-1950." She will speak on the topic at the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum program Monday evening, September 11, from 7:00-9:30 p.m. at Adath Jeshurun Synagogue, 3400 Dupont Avenue South in Minneapolis. The program is cosponsored by the Adath Jeshurun Women's League and the Minnesota Jewish Historical Society, courtesy of the Helen and Leo Wolch Special Projects Fund. A discussion period and reception will follow. The program is free and open to the public.
Message from the President
Susan Margot Smith

Several years ago I lost a large and prestigious fellowship competition in a single sentence. Asked what I thought my greatest strength was, I replied, "I think clouds and turtles are a lot alike." The silence was stunning. We all knew I had just made a cosmic error. My "whimsical" statement might have been all right in a conversation about poetry, but it was not all right in a discussion—which that one was—about administration and finance.

In short, my discourse had to be context-appropriate for my ideas to be considered, or for my language to be explored. To take it even further, my thought had credibility only if it was context-appropriate. I was amazed. And later, rebelling, ran off to do scholarship full time. My secret plan was to spend the rest of my life flinging metaphor around with abandon.

I soon discovered, to my dismay, that the ethos of scholarship as well as the realm of social transactions, had its own strict norms concerning context-appropriate discourse. At that point I finally understood that what I call "the tyranny of context" derives its power from an intensely social need.

Affiliation with context, as I am speaking of it here, names us. It vouches for our credibility. It proves that we belong, to ourselves as well as others. Who can afford to play with metaphor, or idle away her time thinking metaphorically, if that very activity is likely to lead her to context-inappropriate images or conclusions that result in being shunned? Or homeless altogether. Better to confine oneself to the cage of context.

As news of your activities and interests came in, I was enthralled by the metaphors created simply by gathering your ideas together in one place. I wondered to myself what impact I would have on your thinking as you glanced through the lists recruiting images of sculpture, Chinese youth organizations, or Minnesota farm communities in little clusters. And I was reminded of a phrase Roger Jones wrote several years ago, "...the metaphoric act transcends language and vitalizes creativity in science" (Physics as Metaphor, 1982).

And I thought, not for the first time, that one thing an independent scholars' forum must do is to foster the metaphoric act and vitalize creativity by birthing a different sort of context. For this idea of context I am indebted to feminist philosopher Mary Daly whose short essay "Be-Friending: Weaving Contexts, Creating Atmospheres" appears in Weaving the Visions: New Patterns in Feminist Spirituality (Christ and Plaskow, 1989). Her emphasis is on Be-Friending as a correction to the "prevailing conditions of the State of Separation." Be-Friending, says Daly, creates a context in which "acts/leaps of Metamorphosis can take place."

The potential of metaphorical synergy among independent scholars—from artist-musicians to physicists—is unlimited and uncharted. As I see it, our challenge in the year to come is to do the Be-Friending that will weave a new sort of context/atmosphere.

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scholars who did not complete a project in 1985-87, and the unemployed. The ACLS Survey of Scholars, reported in the summer 1986 issue of Scholarly Communication, provides data that suggests the number of independent scholars in the United States is around 25,000.

Who are they? There appear to be more women than men. They are in their 30's and above, with a substantial number in their 50's and 60's, an age group certain to grow. They are spread out all over the United States, but many live near the university they attended, where their spouse teaches, or where they work, teach part-time, or use the library. Most, but not all, are in the humanities and social sciences, especially history.

If, as some predict, a shortage of university faculty develops in the 1990's, some independent scholars will be prepared to enter full-time faculty positions. Most, it appears, would not choose that alternative. Those not in the labor force who enjoy full-time research might not want to reduce their research time. The employed might find it difficult to take a pay cut to become an assistant professor, for which their record of publications might overqualify them. However, many independent scholars express great love of teaching: they might find irresistible an opportunity to teach full time. At present, many independent scholars teach one university course per year, typically with special care and enthusiasm.

Individuals become independent scholars either by completing or working toward a doctoral degree or by developing an intense interest in a subject. Members of the latter category have a B.A., perhaps from an excellent liberal arts college, or an M.A. They often refer to a childhood love of reading that developed into a desire to write. Some have published articles in scholarly journals.

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The Forum is a quarterly publication of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum


Board of Directors: Marilyn Chiat Susan Milnor Joyce Fullard Susan M. Smith Ginny Hansen Bob Thimmesh Ned McCraine Laura Weber David Wiggins
October Program
Helen Benton Minnich--A Retrospective


Minnich, and her zoologist husband Dwight, had long been known for their collection of old prints—fashion pictures, flowers, birds, and natural history illustrations—which had been shown in private galleries, homes, and museums throughout the Twin Cities. Those who attended the shows, or the courses on prints offered by the Minnichs in their home, knew that she had worked in textile design before her marriage, and was an artist in her own right. After her husband died, and the Minneapolis Institute of Arts acquired the Minnich prints, she was usually introduced as a "patron of the arts."

This year, the Forum will introduce Helen Minnich as an independent scholar, a creative intellectual who worked all her life to interpret history and culture in a "painterly" way. She believed in synchronistic events, and the convergence of geography and history in cycles that could be artistically illustrated. At the time of her death, she was working on a manuscript called *Patterns of the Past* that documented these ideas. The same themes had appeared in her book for children, *A Bright Book of Lights*, and a manuscript idea for the "fashions of motherhood."

Join us on Sunday, October 15th at 3:00 to celebrate a scholarly life lived independently, at the Hennepin County Historical Society, 2403 Third Avenue South, Minneapolis. A program of recollections and comment from some of the people who knew her will be followed by a reception. Some of her work will be on exhibit. Music featuring the Irish wire-strung harp will be provided by Adrienne and David Wiggins.

This event will be co-sponsored by the Hennepin County Historical Society and the Kerlan Collection of the University of Minnesota. Gifts to commemorate Helen Benton Minnich's birthday may be designated for independent scholar grant funds, or an unrestricted program fund. For further information, call 870-1329 or Susan Smith, President of the Forum, 871-1125.

Upcoming Programs


**September 30 "Festival of the Book."** The Forum will be represented along with 100 other book-related organizations at St. Paul Landmark Center and Rice Park for an all day event.

**October 5 "The 12th Annual James Ford Bell Library Book Auction."** Wilson Library, U of Minn., 4th Floor, 7:30 p.m. Forum members will receive a special invitation and auction catalog from Jack Parker, Curator of the Library.

**October 15 "Helen Benton Minnich--A Retrospective."** Presentation will be given by Forum President, Susan Smith at Hennepin County Historical Society, 2403 3rd Avenue So., Minneapolis, 3:00 p.m. Music featuring Irish wire-strung harp to be provided by Adrienne and David Wiggins.

**November 3-4 "Saving and Praising the Past: The Preservation and Appreciation of Minnesota's Religious Architecture."** Co-sponsoring conference held at Coffman Union, University of Minnesota. The keynote address will be given by a prominent authority on American religious history, Martin Marty.

Programs are free and open to the public. Please bring your friends!
Past Program Highlight: "A Double Insight"

A lively audience traveled with John Parker through time and space on May 20 to take a fresh look at travel literature as a literary genre. From the Argonauts to Lindbergh, Parker observed, travel writers have seen what they reported in terms of their own values, missions, and concerns. So not only do we learn about new places, we also learn about the "cultural baggage" the traveler-writer carried along.

Travelers in the Odyssey, for example, reveal in their tales what the Greeks took to be virtues; the History of Herodotus, in its description of Ninevah, is "a statement about Greek love for details and specifics." Early Medieval travel tales, on the other hand, often described new worlds through the "religious quest" that dominated Europe at the time. Still later, European reports from "missionary-ambassadors" reflected their intent to gain allies against the Moslems and wealth from the East.

A Book Affair

The Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum will have a display at the Minnesota Festival of the Book, all day Saturday, September 30th at the St. Paul Landmark Center and adjacent Rice Park.

Joining over 100 other book-related organizations, the Forum will share a table this year with Minnesota Reviews, Inc. This is an excellent opportunity to learn how independent scholars can contribute to Minnesota Reviews. Forum members are encouraged to display any of their work (publications, etc.) at the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum table, or to join us there to help tell others about the Forum.

If you have questions or have something you would like to display, please contact David Wiggins at 823-5379 or Ned McCraine at 377-0866.†

Saving and Praising the Past

Contained in the baggage brought by Minnesota's settlers from their lands of origin were their religious beliefs - beliefs that would need to find physical expression in a new environment. Minnesota's religious architecture, from its most magnificent edifices to its most modest, reflects the adaptations and accommodations made by those who brought their religious traditions to life in a new world.

This is the subject of a conference for which the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum is a co-sponsor titled, "Saving and Praising the Past: The Preservation and Appreciation of Minnesota's Religious Architecture", to be held at Coffman Union, University of Minn., November 3-4.

The conference will provide a forum to discuss the significance of places of worship as historical resources for congregations and their communities at-large. It will also address practical issues involved in the restoration, preservation and funding of local projects.

Through lectures, panel discussions and workshops, participants will have the opportunity to meet and hear scholars and other professionals address the issue: How to adapt yesterday's worship space for today's needs.

For further information, call Marilyn Chiat at 926-7936 or Carol Frenning at 374-5779 - who are co-directors of the conference.†
Study Groups

Study groups provide members the opportunity to explore ideas through reading and discussion. Depending on the desires of the group, a familiar topic of interest may be studied in greater depth, or an unknown topic may be investigated. The ideas offered by other members prove to be thought-provoking, and also helpful in providing new insights when returning to one's independent work.

Anyone interested in "sitting in" or joining currently established study groups is welcome. Membership is not mandatory, although eventually desired. The following is a list of active and inactive study groups:

18th/19th Century Study Group
Contact Joyce Pullard 333-4605

This study group's multidisciplinary interests include art history, literature, philosophy, history, and political science, from the Restoration period to the early 19th century. The group is continuing discussion of the essays on English literature in The New 18th Century.

Anyone interested in sampling the activities of the 18th/19th Century Study Group, is invited to attend a social evening and planning session on September 29th. For location and time, call 377-0866 after September 1st.

International Feminism Group
This study group considers women's issues worldwide; members have focused on informal discussions and analysis of materials treating the interplay among gender, nature, and social order.

Social History Study Group
Contact Jo Blatti 291-7048

This group was formed with the idea of investigating the fields of historiography and public history.

Writing Support for Women Group
Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

The operating assumptions of this group are that women encounter particular barriers to achievement when they are writing and that many of these barriers can be overcome with the support of other women who are writing. Writing goals may range from fiction to research presentations. Procedures will be worked out by participants.

Philosophy and Cultural Criticism Study Group
Contact Patrice Koelsch 722-3813

Family History Study Group
Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

This group was formed with the idea that family history, when correctly interpreted, can reveal truths, not only about family, but about much else in our cultural history that is otherwise concealed. Family history goes far beyond the genealogical facts and dates revealed. When questions about gender, ethnicity, geography, naming practices and other rituals usually associated with religious affiliation, intellectual and artistic products are asked, the full richness in the potential of family history study is evident.

Art Historians Study Group
Contact Catherine Vesley 789-5888

This study group was started by people interested in presenting programs within the range of specialties which art history comprises. The first program, "Watteau and the Dance", was presented in February, 1989.

The following groups are proposed to the membership. If there is sufficient interest in starting these groups or proposing a study group of your own, please contact Susan Smith at 871-1125.

Chaos Study Group
Contact David Wiggins at 823-5379

Philosophical Approaches to Aging Study Group
Contact Frankie Hall at 454-3903
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journals, but more have written books, in many cases published by university presses.

Persons with doctorates are independent scholars because they did not want to be professors or because they sought but did not secure a faculty position, or they were unhappy with their academic position and resigned, or they are retired profes-
sors, or they are current professors whose research is entirely independent of their academic position.

Some independent scholars are not in the labor force, but their spousal patron may be a professor. Those who are employed usually have neither physically exhausting jobs nor managerial positions that require a 60-hour work week. Many have settled into workplaces where their intellectual identity is respected, even if their employers are not fully supportive: time off is possible to attend a conference but counts as vacation time.

Many work as non-researchers in publishing houses, foundations, university offices of development or continuing education, libraries, museums, or in small nonprofit organizations with boards that welcome an individual's scholarly activity as an enhancement of his or her leadership ability. Non-academic settings may enrich one's scholarship: an editor writing a novelist's biography may have special insight into how the novelist was affected by editors, or a sociologist employed in a university office may publish discrete participant observations of the workplace. Employed independent scholars do research and writing on Sundays, weekday evenings, and during vacations. Those not working outside the home can do research and writing almost any time. Most independent scholars use a personal computer.

Isolation has been considered the curse of the independent scholar, but it is remarkable how often people find readers for drafts of their writing. Communication may be with a professor (perhaps a former thesis advisor or colleague), or with other researchers (perhaps by correspondence), or with members of a local discussion group. Most of the independent-scholar groups that started around 1980 are still thriving: major ones exist in Boston, New Haven, New York, Princeton, Durham, Minneapolis, San Diego, San Francisco, and Portland. Most were started and have been led by women, and the majority of members are women (despite the criticism by some feminists that the concept of the independent scholar is to be avoided as yet another way to deflect women from the professions). Some local groups of independent scholars have begun to make small grants to help support their members' research. National discipline-based groups cultivate a presence for independent scholars in the learned societies.

Colleges and universities may also be helpful. More and more university libraries are open to independent scholars, often because of the persistent work done by local independent-scholar groups. The main problems are that libraries and other collections may not be open on evenings and weekends, or they may not let outsiders use inter-library loan or check out books. Some independent scholars have become affiliate members of university departments or research centers, which enhances their scholarly identity and may provide them with a free library card to check out books. In rare cases, a center has acted as a fiscal agent for an affiliate's grant application. Nevertheless, most libraries of private universities are still closed to independent scholars who are not their alumni.

James Bennett is researching the social contexts of independent scholars, and has been awarded a major grant from the Spencer Foundation for a two-year project at Northwestern University.

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Our weekly and monthly publications often run "Best of the Twin Cities" promotions, querying their readership as to "the best" restaurants, bookstores, etc. The Forum would like to ask its readers to share "the best" libraries or other quiet places for studying, writing, etc. Many of us do not have offices suitable for our independent scholarship and need to get away from our home studies from time to time. Where are your favorite places to get away from it all? We're not necessarily interested here in the facilities with the best collections or resources, merely a calm, well-lit public place with tables... Send suggestions to Laura Weber, 3310 Fremont Ave. So. #306, Minneapolis, MN 55408. All replies will be published in the next issue of The Forum.

Joint Subscriptions

Several Forum members indicate that scholarly journals are an increasingly difficult, though essential, investment for them to make. A possible solution might be for people to pool resources on one or more journals, and then circulate them with routing slips. If you are interested in such an arrangement, call Carolyn Gilman at 642-1301 after September 1.

Conferences

Oct. 12-14 National meeting of National Association of Artists' Organizations, Minneapolis.

Nov. 8-10 "Escape from the Holocaust: The Jews in Scandinavia," University of Minnesota.


Members' Services

The following is a list of services offered to members of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum:

Current Services

- Offers public programs.
- Sponsors study groups that informally explore subjects such as 18th century studies, and the relationships between science and the humanities.
- Enables members to gain access to the University of Minnesota Libraries.
- Publishes a quarterly newsletter.
- Cooperates with other organizations to promote independent scholarship.

Job Opportunities

Anoka-Ramsey Community College is advertising for a one year appointment in geography. Part-time English instructors are needed also.

Paper Calls

Finn Forum IV to be held in October, 1990 at the University of Minnesota. Call for papers forthcoming -- contact Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota for further information.

From the Membership

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- $75.00 or more

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Mail to: Susan Smith
2415 Third Ave. So. #A-39
Minneapolis, MN 55407
Upcoming Program Dates:

Sept. 11  "Minneapolis Jews and Employment 1930-1950."

Sept. 30  "Festival of the Book"

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