The Forum

The Newsletter of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum

Vol. 2, No. 1 **Winter 1990**

Independent Scholars and the Revolution in Information Technology

By David Wiggens

Scholarship didn't begin with the technology of the book and it will not end with the technology of the computer. But, just as the book forever changed what scholars do, so too the computer is redefining scholarship in ways that we are just beginning to imagine. As independent scholars, the implications of this major revolution in information technology are both heartening and frightening.

First, let me clarify my position about computers. I'm not in the camp of enthusiasts who believes that machines will soon think so much better than humans that we can turn the business of thought over to our supercomputers and sit back and wait for the truth to print out. I'm also not one of those who insists that everyone must use a computer or lose my respect. The dictum "publish or perish" would have excluded Socrates and many others; just as today, the dictum "compute or be condemned" would exclude some of our best minds.

The computer is only a tool—but what a tool! At every stage of the business of scholarship, the computer (and the related technology of modems, storage devices, etc.) is changing what we can do. The computer can help us find the work of scholars around the world and deliver it to our offices at the push of a button. It allows us to write a draft of a lengthy work, send it electronically (via modem) to another scholar for comment, make any suggested changes, and then submit it to a publisher, all without ever having to print a hard copy. (Sure beats the typewriter and the Xerox machine method.) The computer can also help us manipulate large and complex collections of information.

These uses of computer technology are already common and welcome, yet they are based on our traditional forms of written scholarship. A more innovative application of computer technology features a new and different way of assembling connected patterns of information. One of these forms was demonstrated by Claire McInerney at our January program.

Claire has compiled a "HyperCard stack" index to the 500 hours of audio tapes recorded by Meridel LeSueur. This stack is not designed to be read like a book or to

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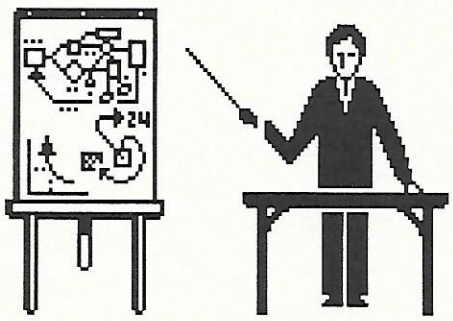

What's on Your Desk? What's on Your Mind?

An open forum is planned for February 17 at 10:00 a.m. at the St. Paul Central Library, 4th Floor Meeting Room. This is an opportunity for members to informally discuss their current works in progress, to meet other members who share similar interests, and maybe even start a new study group. Members already planning to participate are Joyce Fullard, Ginny Hansen, Christine Lac, Dave Megarry, Susan Smith, and David Wiggins.

It's not too late to call David if you want to be put on the official list of presenters, or if you prefer, just show up and you will be given a chance to share an interesting theory, a puzzling paradox, or a research tidbit.

Come, listen and join the dialogue.

Message from the President

Susan Margot Smith

An intriguing article by William Irwin Thompson titled "Shaping a New Imagination" appeared in the December issue of *Edges*. I bought the issue on the strength of the first two sentences in the article, which refer to a "dramatic transformation of imagination," "re-perceiving the shape of the behaviour of things," and the "shared imagination of art and science." Altogether, those phrases seemed to evoke the agenda I've been proposing for the Forum during the last few years.

The phrases also led me to a fresh appreciation of the current activities of the Forum and its members. If anything works toward shaping a new imagination, it is the concept of the timeline Vince Leo developed as a project of the First Banks Visual Arts Program. I was electrified by his way of "re-perceiving" the dynamics of cause and effect, and his arguing for the complexity of things with an elegantly simple visual device.

It strikes me, in fact, that even our programs this year illustrate different forms of the re-shaped imagination. Those of you who attend our March program, for example, will discover that "history that hurts" is significantly more than a canoe trip. Ann Heymann's presentation in May will explain how her work with the Clairseach has involved a great deal more than playing the harp. The task of reshaping the imagination is also at the heart of "Culture Under Canvas," which the Forum is co-sponsoring in early summer. I think it testifies to the vitality of the Forum that our combined activities and interests embody so much intellectual adventure.

Our challenge as an organization for independent scholars is to support this work with structures that do not inhibit or define it. The Board will be in a position to seek major funding for the Forum in late spring. That will involve constructing an organizational plan with ordered priorities and projected dates for achieving them. High on our list of priorities are material support for individuals, improved procedures for communicating with each other and the public, and work space of our own. Please let any of us on the Board have your opinions and suggestions.

You will notice a change of address on the newsletter and on our letterhead. This reflects an agreement between the Boards of the Independent Scholars' Forum and the Hennepin County Historical Society to let the Forum use the Society's address and telephone number for business purposes. We anticipate that this change will vastly improve our ability as a Board to communicate with you and with others who are interested in the Forum.

I look forward to seeing you and hearing about your work at our "open forum" on February 17.

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remain fixed in its present form, but it's a program to be used interactively and to be modified and improved over time. With current technology the stack could be connected to a digital recording of LeSueur's audio tapes and the user could call up her voice directly from the indexed reference.

I have been at work on a different HyperCard stack of my own, which is designed to work with a laser disc. At the push of a "button," a full motion dramatization of a historical event freezes on the computer screen and the viewer/user has the option of exploring the records that document the events and characters depicted. The cross references in the stack correspond to the many interconnections that I've been able to identify in my search of the historical records.

Both Claire and I used teams of people on our HyperCard projects, and while it is possible for the independent scholar to do this sort of work alone, it is much easier and more fun to use a team approach. As we see the integration of various media like video and computer programs, it will be necessary to structure productions in such a way that we make good use of people's varied talents.

So far, my project has involved nearly 150 people in one way or another. In a sense, however, any future user of my program is a potential team member. Unlike a printed work, modifiable programs never reach a final state. They are always in a "draft" state and are open for review and revision. The suggested conceptual structure encoded in assembling the many connections in such a program can be reworked by any scholar who identifies an alternative way to link records. The user will simply make a new "button" designating the new connection.

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

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Editor's Note: Deadline for the next issue of The Forum is April

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March Program

History that Hurts: A Journey by Bateau...along the Voyageurs' Highway...

David Wiggins on the Voyageurs' Highway

In August1989, six men and three women from the fur trade history reenactment group, La Compagnie Des Hivernants de la Riviere St. Pierre, took a trip along the voyageurs' highway as it would have been done in the year 1800. The diet, costume, vessels, and travelling practices of the group were all carefully based on research.

The results of employing such an authentic recreation of the past were injury, near disaster, and insight into history that is unattainable through library research. (This trip is regarded as an example of experimental archeology.)

One concession the group made to modern technology was made to allow the trip to be documented with outstanding photographs.

Plan now to join several of the expedition's participants on March 24 at 10:00 a.m. at the Fort Snelling History Center for an illustrated account of the journey and some readings from historical and contemporary journals.

Program Previews for Spring

Notices for individual programs will be sent to all Forum members. Forum programs are free and open to the public.

March 24 "History that Hurts: A Journey by Bateau and Birchbark Canoe along the Voyageurs' Highway from Grand Portage," Fort Snelling History Center. Members from La Compagnie de Hivernauts de la Rivier St. Pierre, a group that reenacts the life of the Minnesota fur trade, relate their August 1989 adventure from Grand Portage to Ely, Minnesota, as it would have been done by a small brigade of voyageurs in the year 1800. Excerpts from journals of those who originally travelled the route will be cited.

April 21 " Red November, Black November: Culture and Community in the Industrial Workers of the World" Hennepin County Historical Society. Sal Salerno will present an illustrated talk about the I.W.W.

April 28-29 "Society for 18th Century Studies, U.S. Annual Meeting." Douglas Birk, Joyce Fullard, and Patrice Koelsch will be participants at this meeting. Forum members interested in details should contact Joyce Fullard.

May 12 "The Mythology and Music of the Clairseach," Hennepin County Historical Society. Ann and Charlie Heymann are the world experts on the music and traditions of the Irish clairseach (the wire-strung Celtic harp). Ann, through extensive research, managed to reconstruct the traditional playing technique that had died out at the end of the 18th century. The Heymanns scoured the libraries and museums of Europe to uncover the rich mythological and musical tradition associated with the instrument.

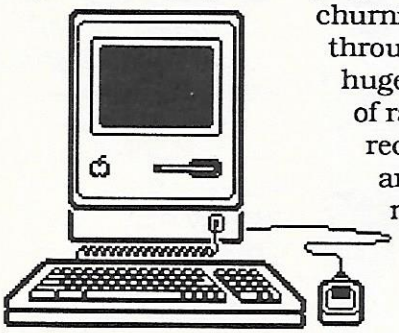
May 31-June 3 "Culture Under Canvas." The Forum is co-sponsoring this national conference for performers of historical characters, and specifically some workshops that focus on the research that goes into the creation of "first person living history" characters.

January Program Highlights:

Computer Tools for Independent Scholars

This was not a program about nuts and bolts or even about chips and files. Instead, our three presenters provided the audience with a glimpse of some of the most exciting developments in the application of computers to scholarship. Claire McInerney led off with a presention of a HyperCard stack, designed to run on an Apple Macintosh, that allows a researcher to make use of the hundreds of hours of audio tapes recorded by writer and activist Meridel LeSueur. For more information or to obtain a copy of the stack on disk, contact her.

John Wickre then fired up his computer and demonstrated how he has applied a standard word processing program, XYwrite, to read and search thousands of boxes of records. The computer screen shown on the overhead projector displayed the program churning through a huge body of railroad records and making a file that listed every document that discussed locomotives—a task that would take a researcher weeks, if not months.



David Shupe concluded the program with a challenging presentation that brought into focus some of the ideas that were suggested by the demonstrations of the specific programs. His vision of a future in which books can be published on demand and conceptual structures can be regularly reconfigured would have seemed unbelievable had we not just seen a glimpse of the future in the first two presentations. Shupe challenged us to keep the important philosophical debates alive as we move into a new order of information. He also suggested that we will see the fields of rhetoric, epistemology, and semantics growing increasingly important.

Following the program, the audience became so involved in the discussion that time had to be called. Most everyone left with many questions still burning in their minds.

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I think that independent scholarship is not only going to become easier with the developing technology (a heartening prospect), I believe that it is going to become the prevailing way to learn. In a world of ideas where people are regularly redefining what is considered important, learning will be ongoing—it can't possibly be confined to a period of formal education leading to a career or job. Nor, will teachers any longer be the sole experts in a particular body of knowledge. Rather, the division between teachers and students will, of necessity, break down when teachers can no longer master whole subject areas and their students will work with them in a common exploration of subject matter. At some point, the job of the schools will have to change from teaching truths to developing students' attitudes and skills for independent learning.

At the college and university level, computers and the revolution in information technology are transforming the old academic order, in part because much of that order has been closely tied to the technology of the printed word. Writers of scholarly books, articles, or PhD theses have had to conform to the orthodox interpretations that precede their works. The processes of peer review for publication and other standards of form have ensured that any new interpretations will follow in a linear way from the old. The related institutions of tenure for faculty and degrees for students have helped perpetuate those ideas that passed the filter of publication.

Today, new electronic paths open to scholars are far less encumbered by filters for academic orthodoxy. Instead, there are other barriers that don't necessarily have anything to do with content of information or the qualifications of scholars (a disheartening aspect). For example, people who don't have the machines to get into this game or the money to pay for on-line research services are left out. Also, there are some who may attempt to restrict access to information for reasons of "national security" or corporate profit and have the power to keep whole subject areas out of the hands of independent researchers. These can be serious obstacles, but on the whole I believe the new technology is opening rather than restricting areas of scholarship.

Most important, the power of computers to assemble and interconnect the vast amounts of information being generated by specialists makes it possible for us as scholars to begin to tackle the interdisciplinary connections and to articulate the fundamental principles that underlie complex subjects. This is not a reductionist approach that seeks to tease out the fine detail of the world's complexity, although that work will continue, but rather one calling for grand syntheses and open debate about basic philosophical issues—the kind of work that is well-suited to the talents of the independent scholars I know.

Member Spotlight Feature: Vince Leo

"History books are being rewritten all the time." Andy Warhol, 1969, from the book, *Timetable Project*

Vince Leo—artist, writer, and associate editor of *Artpaper*--talked about the significance of his widely reviewed *Timetable Project.* Sponsored by First Banks Visual Arts Program, the 38 page book/portfolio appeared in 1989 just before the drama of Tiananmen Square.

The *Timetable Project* was commissioned to respond to the controversy that erupted when First Bank opened its Milwaukee gallery with an exhibition of Warhol prints that included his Mao portfolio. The "timeline" juxtaposes a selective record of political, cultural, and biographical events with dates from financial history. It is accompanied by a visual essay of 15 photographs, each of which contains within it the official 1959 portrait of Chairman Mao Zedong.

Susan Smith: Tell me how you became involved in the *Project*... what you wanted to do with it.

Vince Leo: I was given a problem to solve...First Banks thought everybody would love Warhol...it was popular art. Everybody didn't, and nobody at First Banks could understand what had gone wrong. The strong reaction was because people saw the Mao prints in the photos as images promoting Communism and thought that they (the prints) were inappropriate in a bank, an institution of capitalism...My task was to put the Warhol exhibit in a larger context. The book is meant to continue the process of challenging people to think about art--and about the way things really happen in the world.

SS: Why did you choose the timeline device?

VL: It brings data together so that we can see that there are interconnections in things...it's a way of making synchrony visible...At the same time it avoids simplistic cause-and-effect, good-guy/bad-guy solutions. The timeline can be either prosaic or poetic. I resist the use of the timeline that points to a single conclusion.

SS: How did you choose the photographs you used in the *Timetable?*

VL: The ones I chose each had the official 1959 portrait of Mao in it...in a different context. There's a riddle in each one: find the portrait of Chairman Mao—once you've found it you have to stick it in the one before it and the one after it—in doing that you construct a history of your own.

SS: What role do they play in the book?

VL: Adding a photo essay ...A visual sequence unfolds meaning in a different way.

SS: Why did you include historical data about banking in the *Timetable?*

VL: The fact that the pictures were in the bank was crucial to the response—because where they were was part of where that response came from...

SS: What does the *Timetable* say about art?

VL: Well, it says that images matter. We come together around an image—and suddenly we clash. We think, in our distance from one another, that we are all alike. We converge on an object, a symbol...at that point we are very close to one another, and it reveals that <u>everyone</u> is implicated...we're all involved in the events around us...it's not a matter of us and them...In response to the picture, our clash with one another becomes recognizable, articulated...art has that power.

SS: You say everyone is implicated. What about the artistic community?

VL: The artist doesn't always operate outside time and space...Warhol could do anything he wanted to Mao's picture...screen it, brush it...people recognized it—and Mao stood for something...the people who objected got right to the point that people in the art world chose to ignore—Warhol was making a very political choice in using Mao's portrait around the time Nixon went to China.

SS: What conclusion does the timeline draw? That there is no prime mover in human events?

VL: That there's <u>more</u> than one prime mover—and that there's a disjuncture between official history, and the factual events that people actually live.

Study Groups

Study groups provide members the opportunity to explore ideas through reading and discussion. Depending on the group's interests, a familiar topic may be studied in depth, or an unknown topic may be investigated. The ideas offered by group members are often thought-provoking and helpful to the independent scholar.

You are invited to "sit in" or join an established study group. Membership is not mandatory. If you are interested in convening one or more of these groups or starting a group of your own, pending Board approval, please contact Susan Smith at 871-1125. Following is a list of active study groups:

"Chaos" Study Group
Contact David Wiggins 823-5379

This newly organized group meets for the mutual exploration of the study of nonlinear dynamics as discussed in the book *Chaos* by James Gleick. Implications of research in nonlinear dynamics are being felt in many fields today.

18th/19th Century Study Group
Contact Joyce Fullard 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. Anyone interested in sampling the activities of the 18/19th century is invited to call 377-0866 for time and location.

Science and Humanities Study Group Contact Rhoda Gilman 224-6383

The Science and Humanities Study Group is currently reading *Science, Order and Creativity* by David Bohm and F. David Peat. The group meets every three to four weeks.

Sacro Vosco, *The Sphere of the World*

The following groups are presently inactive:

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.

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.

International Feminism Group
Contact Susan Smith 871-1125

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

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 they can be overcome with the support of other women who are writing.

Group on "Patterns in Women's Spirituality" Forms

When Womanspirit Rising appeared in 1979, it challenged a widely held feminist position that society had outgrown its need for religion. It called for the transformation of patriarchal traditions and the creation of new ones. All of its contributors saw a relationship between a transformation of spirituality based on women's experience and the transformation of the social order.

Ten years later, women's spirituality has moved into the traditions, into the academic curriculum, and into the center of the feminist agenda. We are beginning to appreciate the diversity of women's experience, and the need to listen to the many voices speaking of it. Nothing less than a "new way of seeing and knowing" will be the group's focus.

Contact Terri Hawthorne, Laura Weber, or me about the next meeting on March 2 from 7:30-9:30 p.m. at my home. We will be reading and discussing *Weaving the Vision: Patterns in Feminist Spirituality* (pp 139-162) and *Woman of Power* (Fall/Winter 1990). *Susan Smith*

Officers, Board Members Elected for 1990

At the Forum's Annual Meeting on November 18, members approved a bylaws change that separated the offices of treasurer and secretary. A White Ballot was cast for the following officers and board members: John Carmichael, Joyce Fullard (treasurer), Rod Haberman, Ginny Hansen, Curt Hillstrom, Susan Margot Smith (president), Laura Weber, and David Wiggins (vice president). Board members later elected David Megarry to the Board and to the office of secretary at their January meeting, as directed by the membership at the Annual Meeting.

Sarah R. Mason spoke to Forum members following the business meeting. Her lecture and slide presentation was titled, "From Tiananmen Square to the Hmong (Maio) Villages of Guizhou: Reflections on China in the Eighties." Hennepin County Historical Society co-sponsored the lecture. Director and Forum member John Baule provided refreshments.

Members' Services

Current services for the members of the Minnesota Independent Scholars' Forum include:

- Public programs.
- Study groups that informally explore subjects such as 18th century studies, relationships between science and the humanities, and others.
- Access to the University of Minnesota Libraries.
- A quarterly newsletter.
- Cooperative arrangements with other organizations to promote independent scholarship.

Call For Volunteers

While we are seeking funds to support the continued growth of the Forum, we need volunteers to help with a variety of administrative tasks. If you can volunteer even a small amount of time, your help would be greatly appreciated. Contact anyone on the Board for information on the opportunities available.

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Upcoming Programs

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St. Paul Central Library, 4th Floor Meeting Room

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