Distributive Justice by Curt Hillstrom

Why I am Running for Political Office by Rhoda Gilman

Our Roads: Arteries or Perforated Colon? by David Juncker

Book Review: Joseph Amato's Rethinking Home by Lucy Brusic
Editorial Notes...

Recently, Simon Schama wrote an article in the New York Times criticizing American response to calamity: we swing from Pollyanna—wishful thinking—to Chicken Little—indiscriminate fear—without looking for a realistic stance in between.

But if Pollyannism is na""ve for these times and Chicken Little-ism, paralyzing, what model should we take? Someone has suggested that Huckleberry Finn might be a good role model. Huck is keenly aware of the foibles, corruption, and downright evil of some of the people whom he meets on the river, but he survives by using his wits and his cunning. In doing so, he learns something about the worth of human life.

All our writers for this issue of The Forum have something of Huck Finn in them. Curt Hillstrom, Rhoda Gilman, and David Juncker have contributed articles that describe some part of the human condition that they would like to see attended to—now! And in their way, they are trying to do something. Gilman explains why she is running for political office, in response to a question I asked her; the forcefulness of her article definitely challenges my relative indifference to politics. Juncker outlines in graphic detail a problem—roads—that afflicts our cities, and he suggests ways to do something about it. Hillstrom has written a passionate description of a society better than the one we currently live in, with clear guidelines as to how we might get to it. Although Hillstrom is writing from a philosopher's viewpoint, what he says is eminently political in scope. All these writers point to things that are wrong in our world and try to apply wits and cunning to the solution of the problems they describe. The problems they outline will not yield to easy solutions—neither Pollyanna nor Chicken Little need apply—so it is good to know that we have a Huck Finn or two willing to tackle the political and practical world around us.

I hope that all these articles will cause you to think and talk and vote when the November elections roll around.

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A final word about the new look of The Forum. It has been the conviction of the editorial board for some time that The Forum would serve MISF better as a journal than strictly as a newsletter. Although we will continue to run news about members in the back of the journal, we would like to move toward a more scholarly publication. We have a new cover and wider columns; money is available to include more pages for longer articles. Book reviews are an important feature of this journal. Please contact me if you have an article or a book review that you would like to contribute. The next deadline for the journal is late December, but I will be happy to talk or correspond with you at any time.

Lucy Brusic

Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Distributive Justice</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why I am Running for Political Office</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our Roads: Arteries or Perforated Colon?</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book Review: Joseph Amato's Rethinking Home</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report on Scholars' Forum, September 15</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>President's Report</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Distributive Justice
by Curt Hillstrom

This article arose as a response to a reading by the Philosophy Study Group. The Philosophy Study group, which meets about every three weeks, invites members to present their own opinions in writing for the group to discuss. Anyone who would like to join the Philosophy Study group should contact Curt Hillstrom at 612-823-5132. Hillstrom will offer a philosophical justification of his point of view in the next issue of the The Forum.

Distributive justice is a rationale to spread the wealth and power among the citizens of a community in a way that is perceived as just and fair by its citizens. Perceived is perhaps the key word here. The citizens must feel that their efforts are at the least adequately rewarded, and that no one gets more than their fair share. I also feel that distributive justice should include—to the extent that it does not jeopardize the community as a whole—helping those in need so that they can also contribute to the common good. For people whose situation clearly indicates that they are unable to contribute, such as the seriously ill or the elderly, distributive justice should include provisions that allow them to exist as comfortably as the community can afford.

I am using the word ‘community’ here because these rules and arguments should apply to any coherent, interdependent group, from a family to the whole world. However, in today’s world, nations are the generally recognized entities that have the power to control the wealth of their citizens. Therefore the thrust of this article is aimed toward nations. In particular, it has the United States in mind.

I will present the specifics first: the more practical, political outline of how distributive justice ought to be carried out. This section will be followed by more detail on the processes of social interaction that will lay out the ‘how’ of distributive justice. In the next issue of The Forum I will discuss the philosophical justification for distributive justice.

Gilbert’s Canons
My specific proposals borrow two ideas from Richard S. Gilbert.1 Gilbert advocates what he calls six canons, which include:
1) the Canon of Need (meeting basic human needs),
2) the Canon of Proportional Equality (limits on income and wealth),
3) the Canon of Contribution to the Common Good (work for the many is more valuable than work for the few),
4) the Canon of Productivity (you can take out what you put in),
5) the Canon of Effort and Sacrifice (difficult or demanding work should be more valuable), and
6) the Canon of Scarcity (supply and demand of skills).

I am only using the first two of these canons: the canon of need—a minimum, basic guarantee for all citizens based on the fact that we are all human and, in this sense, all morally equivalent; and the canon of proportional equality—mechanisms to restrict persons or groups from gaining more than their fair share of wealth or from accruing enough power to destabilize the community or important aspects of the community. These are essentially limits defining the minimum and maximum amount of wealth and power available to any single person or group. While the other canons that Gilbert advocates have much to recommend them, I believe that if we were to use them as a basis to make public policy, they would be too subjective, complex, and contentious to be formally adopted by a democratic constituency. Determining what jobs are more valuable than others, no matter what criteria is used, is certain to offend the holders of particular occupations; is likely to tie up the political process in unnecessary contention; and would be subject to frequent change, which could not be addressed quickly or without reopening the whole predicament again.

Here is my interpretation of Gilbert’s first two canons.

Canon of Need: Meeting Basic Human Needs
Food, clothing, shelter. No one should be without any of these. Ever.

Health care, including mental health, from pre-natal existence on. Everyone should have their health needs monitored. This statement does not mean that all health problems will be addressed. A society must ration its health care dollars in a way that is fair and is based on social needs. This rationale could mean some special status for fetuses.

Education. Everyone should have continuing education available to them at a level that is appropriate and in areas that are useful to both the student and to society.

Meaningful work. Each person who is healthy and has minimum competence should be engaged in meaningful work from both a social standpoint—meeting social needs; and from a personal standpoint—satisfying personal values and talents. Work is defined broadly here and does not have to fit into a traditional marketplace category. If the person is not working, then he or she should be in some kind of training or school. If the person cannot find employment in a traditional job, then he or she should be assigned to work for an approved non-profit organization. This last requirement is necessary to keep the few who are very glad to get something for doing nothing from taking unfair advantage of what the community has to offer.

Opting out. There are always some who choose to be unen-continued on next page
Distributive Justice, continued from page 3

...umbered by the contemporary expectations of society. People like Henry David Thoreau come to mind, but there are many others, some of whom will make lasting contributions to the community. Thus I suggest that in order for a citizen to qualify for their government to guarantee their basic needs, he or she must enter a program which would see to it that these needs are met. This program would be inevitably paternalistic to some degree. Those who cannot stand the idea of a paternalistic government watching over them can have the option of not being a part of it at all.

Canon of Proportional Equality: Limits on income and wealth

Limits on income and wealth are in fact limits on power. I define power as the ability to control or influence the overt behavior of other people. Control can be exerted by force or threat of force, or payment for actions taken, or persuasion. Power wielded through physical force should be in the domain of legitimate governments only. There is no place for private militias or paramilitary activity in a settled country.

The ability to buy power is the real problem in America today. People with wealth can hire assistants and agencies that control public policies and other aspects of society. Such control is usually maintained through the flow of wealth to the power-holders and to maintain the power they have. While no one expects complete equality, there are things that can be done to assure that power from wealth does not reach the point where it disrupts a well-run society. These include:

Fair compensation. Each side, the payer and the payee, must feel satisfied that the work done is properly rewarded. Presently the payer has the advantage, though labor unions often help the payee. With the minimum basic guarantees listed above a worker should feel freer to say no to the payer without risking sending his or her family into poverty. If the worker can walk away from the employer without severe penalty, the employers will have to begin treating employees in a manner similar to the way they treat their customers.

Progressive taxation. Taxation is the primary way governments have to control power through wealth. This control includes the estate tax. Large estates in particular need to be absorbed back into society. As the American founding fathers feared, passing large estates intact through generations can lead to a type of aristocracy. The argument that the estate holders should have the right to give their estates to heirs of their choosing is flawed. These estates were accumulated with the help of society through our subsidies for education, roads, courts, a military to protect them from appropriation, and in numerous other ways. It is only right that most of this wealth should be returned to those who made it possible. Furthermore, someone from a family with wealth should have no more advantage at the start of life than someone from a poor family. The argument that motivation is taken away when taxation gets high bothers me considerably. If the only thing that motivates a person who is already wealthy is the accumulation of more wealth, I would consider the wealthy person to have a spiritual problem. In this case I think it especially important to keep him or her from accumulating too much wealth and power.

Protected rights. Some things should not be for sale no matter how much money someone has to pay for it. A current debate in the U.S. is over the sale of free speech. The concept now is that money is equivalent to speech, and that one should be free to spend it however one wants. This situation leads to wealthy people having more freedom of speech than poor people. This consequence is patently undemocratic. Each member of a society should have a single voice. It is the intermingling of these voices that creates policies that are fair and just. When millionaires control the agenda, the needs of the poor are lost.

Gilbert’s remaining four canons can be addressed to a large extent by understanding and respecting the boundaries of social organization defined by sociologist Kenneth Boulding.

Boulding’s Theory of Social Dynamics

Kenneth Boulding outlines a theory of social dynamics in which he identifies three forces of organization within a society. He calls these the threat system, the exchange system, and the integrity system. Perhaps the simplest way of understanding these systems is to imagine that you have some object that I want. I can get this object from you in three different ways:

1) I can forcefully take it from you or threaten to harm you or something you value if you don’t give the object to me. This is the threat system.

2) I can offer you something you value in exchange for the object. This is the exchange system.

3) I can persuade you to give the object to me, appealing perhaps to your benevolence or to some common bond we share. This is the integrity system.

The first of these options depends on the use of legitimate, physical force; the second on the possession and exchange of valuables; and the third involves the personal identities which tie us together. This third way results in a grants culture.

Virtually all social organizations have all three systems at work in them, but tend to be dominated by one—or sometimes two—which directs the power, prestige, and social values of the organization. All three systems should be balanced in a way that lends stability and effectiveness to the organization and its interaction with the community. The armed forces, police, and governments, for example, are largely driven by the threat system; corporations and the marketplace are exchange systems; and families, religious communities, and most non-government organizations are part of the integrity. Co-ops would be an example of a system that shared strong elements of an exchange system and the integrity.

continued on page 7
Why I am Running for Political Office
by Rhoda Gilman

On July 15 I filed as a candidate for Lieutenant Governor of Minnesota and became Ken Pentel’s running mate on the Green Party ticket. A few days later the editor of The Forum asked me why on earth I’d done it. Why would I—or anyone—want to run for public office?

In asking myself, I find that to be the wrong question. The real question is: Why would I not do it? Being offered the chance to run a credible campaign for a party I helped to found and with a running mate whom I strongly support—why would I refuse?

In the year 2002 we still have the remnants of a democracy in our country. Granted that we have an illegitimate president who has plunged us into an illegal and unjustified war, and granted that the opposition party has refused to mount any meaningful challenge either to his assumption of power or to his shredding of the Constitution. Yet we still have the right to campaign for office. We still have access—limited as it may be—to the best tool anyone has ever found for educating people on public issues.

In the often quoted words of Theodore Roosevelt, politics is a “bully pulpit,” and in 2002 it is becoming almost our only one. The last thirty years have seen a massive pyramiding of wealth and power in our country. They have also seen the spread of poverty and hunger—millions of people in the world’s richest land, living without homes, health care, or hope. This is a perilous situation for any democracy, but who is telling us about it? The means of mass communication are controlled by no more than three or four giant corporations, and they are rapidly swallowing up the world of books and publishing that independent scholarship depends on. Bread and circuses—megamalls and superbowls—are the order of the day. The power of money saturates our news media as it saturates our elections. Why would a citizen or scholar not mount any available pulpit?

Looking around the world, the picture is even more grim. Thirty years ago we were warned that the limits to growth were drawing close. Since then a mountain of scientific evidence has confirmed the warning. Yet every major party in every country continues to chant the mantra of a growth economy, with more jobs, more goods, and more people. Like an alcoholic in a state of denial, the world resolutely turns its back on dying species, vanishing forests, devastated soil, polluted waters, toxic air, and all the other symptoms of a threatened planet. Why would any human being not seek the influence over laws and economies that might turn the tide toward sustainability?

I am a woman. Only seven years before I was born my mother cast her first vote in a United States election. In the same year she married my father and gave up her job as a school teacher. Married women were not allowed to teach. She could have run for a position on the school board, but I’m sure it never occurred to her—just as waving a suffrage banner or speaking out for her rights as a citizen had never occurred to her. Others did those things for her, however.

I’ve studied and written about the history of the suffrage movement. I know the bitter blasts of ridicule and ostracism that met its early leaders. I’ve followed the long, painful struggle of women in Minnesota—a state that never welcomed them to politics. I’ve heard the stories of Clara Ueland and Emily Noyes and of my own mother-in-law, Catheryne Gilman. I’ve met Coya Knutsen, whose DFL party conspired to help send her “home” from Congress, where she was the only Minnesota woman to serve until the year 2000. During my fifty years in this state I’ve watched women rise from two seats in the legislature during the 1950s to sixty-one in 1996—and then fall back again to fifty-seven in 2000. Never as much as a third. Why, I ask myself, would any woman who is free and able to do so not seek public office?

I am seventy-five years old. My age and my work in history have given me a sense of time and a certain perspective on issues. Defeat today lays the groundwork for victory tomorrow—or at least for a change in attitudes. I’ve seen it happen. I’ve also seen the corrosive effect over many years of voting for the lesser evil. In my own lifetime I’ve witnessed the long-term danger of electing those who will compromise fundamental principles to keep a hold on power in the short run.

When I look at the defiant, angry faces of many young people, I cannot blame them. They know they will have to pay some of the bills for our own overabundance and reckless waste. In their hearts they’re scared. Looking further I sense that despair is not far below the surface throughout our country. And that, too, is a danger. Despair can be a deadly self-fulfilling prophecy.

Yet there is also wonderful determination and courage. I never cease to marvel at the toughness and adaptability of the human spirit. This old body doesn’t have the strength to join the troops of young protesters who have laid theirs on the line in Seattle, Philadelphia, Quebec, Milan, and elsewhere—or the peace teams who place themselves between tanks and barricades in Palestine or between death squads and their victims in Colombia. But my health is good and my energy holds up through most of the day. Why, then, would this elder not support the young in whatever way she can?—Even by running for office.

Rhoda Gilman is a long-time member of MISE.
Our Roads—Arteries or Perforated Colon?
by David Juncker

We all wish living and working in the Twin Cities to be, and to remain, a vibrant and positive choice for those who are living here and those that are to come. But the combined weight of twenty-five years of less-than-viable decisions concerning the expansion of our metro area roads and highways is threatening the livability of Minneapolis and St. Paul. Following are a few of the many cases that illustrate decisions that may not be healthy for long-term metro area viability.

Case #1
A few years ago, the 35W bridge over Minnehaha Creek was greatly widened. The bridge remained quite low, and the widening plunged the underlying Minnehaha Parkway and Creek into darkness. The solution proposed to the neighborhood was high wattage, 24-hour-a-day electrical lighting. The only way the local neighborhood was able to keep a small opening for daylight, between the north- and south-bound lanes, was to show photos of a similar, low overpass in downtown Houston—including the multiple flood lights and razor wire fencing that have become a necessity there. In the past few months, plans for further widening the bridge, with no mention of increasing (or even keeping) an opening for daylight, have been sent out for bids.

Case #2
The weather in the Twin Cities was once reported from downtown. But the downtown/metro area has become much more dense with increased amounts of asphalt, cement, and concrete, both horizontally, as roads and parking lots, and vertically, as taller buildings. Vast amounts of daytime heat are absorbed, stored, and re-radiated to the surrounding neighborhoods each time the sun goes down. The result is an island of warmer temperatures that causes approaching weather systems to split apart and reform on the other side. Metro weather is so different from the actual weather patterns coursing across the state that it is now necessary for the weather station to be in Chanhassen, a distant suburb.

Case #3
Minneapolis was once the city of towering elms. The lakes and parkways were once nationally famous for birds (especially hummingbirds). But earlier DDT, and high levels of lead (from gasoline), followed by Dutch Elm disease (carried in on road vehicles) and high levels of zinc, arsenic, cadmium, and sulfur (from gasoline and automobile tires), along with lawn treatments containing phosphates, etc., have eliminated large numbers of birds, plants, and trees. It’s not by accident that the Chinese ginkgo tree (one of the very few trees that can withstand high levels of pollutants) is now the apparent tree of choice all over the metro area.

Case #4
Reverberating downtown traffic noise and those neighborhood-unfriendly, extremely noisy, older NWA airplanes have managed to elevate background noise to levels that require more strident police and emergency vehicle warning horns... just to be heard!

What has become quite clear over the last twenty-five years is that our metro roads do not function as “arteries,” a favorite descriptive word used by the Department of Transportation. True arteries function by providing nourishment for growth and eliminating wastes, while they maintain life in adjoining tissues. Although our widening roads have provided for growth, they have increasingly injured the neighborhoods closest to them. Our roads in the Twin Cities are anything but arteries.

In fact, there is no viable, human analog to describe the present state of our metro transportation system. The colon has been discussed; it’s just after the intestines and before the rectum. But the colon, which is focused on containment and movement of wastes, and the reabsorption of water, has also been designed to keep all adjoining tissues alive. The best human analogy for our roads might be a hypertrophied, perforated, redundant colon. Translated from medical jargon, it means an enlarged, leaky, too-long colon. Unfortunately, humans who find themselves bearing the above diagnosis don’t live very long. It’s time to realize that the same applies to cities and metro areas.

Wastes, whether they be
• excess amounts of carbon dioxide from cars, trucks and planes;
• the tons of lead trapped in our dirt (from leaded gas up to the 1970s);
• zinc, cadmium, and arsenic derivatives pumped into neighborhoods from the highways;
• or phosphates and road “run-off” that enter our streams, rivers, and area water supplies
are, each and every one, dangerous to all metro and regional citizens (plants and animals, including humans). It is time for us to rethink the use and abuse of our road system.

Where do we go from here?
A starting point might be updating the McHarg study. In 1992, students and staff at the University of Minnesota’s Design Center for the American Urban Landscape unearthed and revisited the first complete ecological survey of a metropolitan area, done in 1969 by landscape architecture guru Ian McHarg (a Scotsman from Philadelphia). The area was our own Twin Cities. The major planning tenets that McHarg espoused and developed bear repeating:
Our Roads, concluded from previous page

- land is beautiful and vulnerable;
- development is inevitable and must be accommodated;
- uncontrolled growth is inevitably destructive;
- development must conform to regional goals;
- an area can absorb prospective growth without being despoiled;
- planned growth is more desirable than uncontrolled growth; and more profitable;
- public and private powers can combine to realize these goals.

Another study by David Morris in 1992, "Getting from Here to There: Building a Rational Transportation System" came to the same conclusion.

In medical terms it's a bit easier to say: We need to design transportation systems that actually function as healthy arteries — enabling growth without killing part, or all, of the host.

Dave Juncker is a Minnesota scholar.

Distributive Justice, concluded from page 4

Maintaining boundaries between systems

Recognizing the particular dynamics at work within our most important social organizations and institutions, and understanding which dynamic systems ought to be dominant in each of them is, I think, critical to a well-functioning society. To take a simple example, the use of force as a dominant instrument in the marketplace would turn what should be an exchange system institution into a system of extortion that would discourage investment and effectively blunt the advantages of a free market.

While boundary and balance problems are diverse and complex, there is one area in particular that I wish to address with respect to the canon of basic needs and the canon of proportional equality discussed earlier. The free market, an exchange system, operating in a world of supply and demand, is a very effective vehicle for exploiting economic opportunities, providing employment, and creating wealth. Social organizations — schools, churches, and hospitals, for example — which primarily contribute to the growth and development of human beings should not be regarded as simply another part of the free market. While they do necessarily participate in the marketplace for many of their needs, these institutions should be regarded as part of the integrity. The main source of their operating funds should be provided through grants, with no profit motive influencing their operation. This idea does not mean, of course, that a society cannot adopt policies constraining their operations. What it does mean is that a private hospital or school or other such organization that is run to make a profit for its investors is significantly inappropriate. I feel that a community that respects these boundaries can go a long way toward satisfying Gilbert's remaining canons.

A society that does not or cannot provide some of the basic threat system institutions — such as a police force or army — for its citizens is a society in which people must seek physical protection from those who are stronger. This circumstance leads to private armies, warlords, turf battles, frequent brutality, and an absence of justice and significant commerce. Once a legitimately recognized threat system is in place, however, citizen identity with the larger society, a feeling that wrongs will be addressed, and a strong marketplace will eventually transform the society into something vibrant. How much more could we do if we took the next step and freely provided our citizens with protection from poverty, met their health needs, and offered them all the education they needed. Such a society, I believe, would transcend even the best we can imagine today.

3. Boulding’s use of the word integrity is from the integrative aspect of this interaction. He also sometimes refers to the threat system as the polity and the exchange system as the economy.

Curt Hillstrom is a former systems analyst and a long-time member of MISF.
Book Review


In addition to being a member of MISF, Amato is professor of Rural and Regional Studies at Southwest State University in Marshall. His book focuses on ways in which the history of rural regions, and southwest Minnesota in particular, can be told. He believes that history is about many things besides famous men and politics; the subtitle of his book reveals his point of view—that the local historian has important stories to tell. It is refreshing to hear this wisdom in a time when it seems that all history is being written in New York, or Washington, or Afghanistan.

Amato suggests, for example, a history of the physical landscape—the animals or the plants (33) of a region. Then he moves to the emotional landscape. His third chapter “Anger” is particularly illuminating, as he describes ways in which the model of genteel urban middle class behavior expanded into the countryside during the nineteenth century. It is Amato’s contention that fist fights, brawls, and rumbles—once accepted forms of violence (89)—were refined and then outlawed as city folkways spread into the countryside.

Amato’s best chapters are those that deal with specific places—Pipestone (Chapter 9) and Marshall (Chapter 10). In his chapter about Marshall, “Business First and Always,” he discusses some of the themes he sees in American rural history and in so doing sets forth some of his best cautionary advice on writing local history. He says that a romantic view of frontier life grew up during the 1930s as a way to counteract the misery of the Great Depression (174). Though we hold onto the notion that the small town and the family farm are about family values and fixed verities, Amato states his belief that the small town is about business—retail and artisan—but business nonetheless (169-173). His point of view is that the contemporary local historian, to be true to the story of a region, must describe the decline of business in the countryside and in the corresponding local communities. “Telling local stories requires acknowledging national...forces” (180). Among the national forces Amato sees in the modern world is on-line shopping, which will challenge even Wal-Mart and further reduce the sense of community in small towns. He concludes that to deny such factors (presumably to write a romanticized or anecdotal town story) is to deny history.

Anyone who is writing local history (rural or urban) should read this book, both for methodology and for research ideas. Readers of local history should find the book helpful for distinguishing good history from bad. General readers will enjoy the stories that illuminate most chapters. Any reader will appreciate the idea that all the places we live in are full of history. Lucy Brusic

Scholars’ Forum, September 15

“Getting Beyond Technophilia and Technophobia” was the subject of the Scholars’ Forum on September 15 at the First Unitarian Society. Twenty-one people attended the presentation given by Ken Keller, former UMN president, asking such questions as: Does technology drive society or does society drive technology? How are rapid changes in technology affecting our sense of a shared social contract? Can we develop an informed citizenry, capable of debating scientific versus social concerns, achieve grass roots support for methodology, and come up with an effective political model to build consensus among our citizens?

A lively discussion of these concerns provided many insights including a distinction between science and technology: Science is the search to find out how and why things are as they are; while technology is a way of knowing and the knowledge, often resulting in a purposeful way to accomplish certain tasks. “Technology stimulates the study of science,” said Alan Kahn, “while the aim and content of science is understanding.”

Further discussion focused on concern for training young people when the nature of work is changing; differences between push and pull technologies; effects of the Internet on communication and the glut of unscreened information; ethics in research; global vs. local values (a German study was cited); public/private space and information technology; shifts of power from government to non-government organizations and how that shift affects accountability.

This mix was rich for a Sunday afternoon, and the interchange raised awareness of the interconnectedness of the issues. Everyone was challenged to think about the rapid changes our society is undergoing, and how they can participate by smoothing the way. As Ken Keller said, the group that understands the technology that’s coming brings it to the group that needs to know. Our thanks to the presenters and to the organizers of this program for doing just that. Further events in this series are listed on page 10. Shirley Whiting

Member News and Notes

Joseph Amato will speak about his book Rethinking Home on Monday, January 13, 2003 at the Minnesota History Center, as a part of the Brown Bag lecture series. These lectures, which are free, take place from noon to 1 P.M.

Lucy Smith’s Retrospective “Hold to Life” paintings (Poland, France, USA) will take place between September 27-November 3, 2002, at the Gallery in the Baptist Church House of Mercy, corner of Wacouta and 9th Street in St. Paul. Gallery hours are Thursdays 3-6 P.M., Sundays 2-5 P.M. or by appointment; phone (651) 298-0858.
A s we look ahead to our Twentieth Anniversary/Annual Meeting Celebration, a look back is in order as well. Only a Janus-faced approach can accommodate the increasingly surreal climate we find ourselves in, as scholars and as citizens. The illusion of rapid change that technology provides clouds our awareness of the slow pace of human development. If ever there was a time to rally scholarship in service of civil society, that time is now.

When I agreed to become MISF president it was because I sensed an organization of great promise but flagging energies, not surprising in this day of multiple demands on limited time. But with my background in adult education, learning styles, and conflict resolution, I thought ‘how hard could it be to bring this organization to its full potential?’

The answers to that question just keep coming and perhaps no one has learned more than I have this last year. I’ve found widely varying views of the organization, based on people’s experiences within it and their expectations of it.

No matter where one enters conversations of this kind, the processes are the same. We try to articulate inchoate visions and desires to others, who in turn respond with their views; the resulting discussions often feel disjointed and unproductive, when we’re really trying to accomplish the same thing. How to reconcile such disparities? How to Build Community Through Dialogue, as Paula Ruddy and Mary Kay Stranik asked in their recent workshop?

How else, in MISF terms, but for each person to find his or her own scholarly path to interests that give life meaning and be willing to share their findings with others?

I have reviewed MISF’s mission statement many times. I like mission statements. They give a sense of clarity and purpose—and direction. Pinning the mission down to the humble tasks needed to implement it is often more difficult.

Our mission is:
To support research, writing, and publication by independent scholars;
To foster scholarly discussion;
To educate the public about the role and value of independent scholars and their scholarship.

1. To make my contribution to the first of these goals, I will be offering a writing course based on my own research interest: writing as a transformative process. The course will be based on work done at the University of Illinois by George Jensen, and John DiTiberio, published in their book Personality and the Teaching of Composition. Their premise is that an individual’s basic attitude toward life, whether introverted or extroverted, and his or her main method of perception, i.e. intuition or sensation, influences how that person approaches writing, and what s/he chooses to write about.

They cite philosophers David Hume and Maurice Merleau-Ponty as examples. Hume, an extrovert, was actively involved in the world, while Merleau-Ponty was a reclusive thinker who valued solitude. Research and publication by MISF members will continue to be supported through our Works in Progress series.

2. We’ve had good visibility in fostering scholarly discussions with the Scholars’ Forums ably organized by Tom Abeles. This series has been so successful it tends to engulf its parent; yet wisely handled, it could be the prototype for a statewide, yea, nationwide, model that might be emulated down to the elementary school level.

3. Educating the public: As I write this MISF members, along with members of the MN Association of Continuing Adult Education (MACAE) and the MN Jung Association (MJA) are planning Coffee/Issues Forums, supported by our grant from the MN Humanities Commission, to bring awareness of MISF and the role and value of independent scholars and their work to people outside the Twin Cities. The first of these forums will be in St. Cloud this fall.

So as we look ahead to our next twenty years let us consider what MISF has meant to us as a supportive network, and how we can continue to bring MISF to the attention of scholars throughout the state. We hope to see you at the Annual Meeting on November 16; more information about it is on the next page.

Shirley Whiting

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Membership Application
Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum

Regular __$40  Household __$50
Sustaining __$75 or more
Donor __$100 or more
Benefactor __$150 or more
Associate (for organizations) __$40
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Minnesota Independent Scholars’ Forum
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Events for Scholars

Scholars' Forums: Voices of Concern
(Fall Schedule)

October 13, Sam Imbo on Narrative

November 10, Kin Chung Lun
"Why corporations should hire cultural historians"

December 8, Jim Erickson on Oral History

Sundays, 2-4 p.m. All welcome,
First Unitarian Society, 900 Mt. Curve, Minneapolis.
(Behind the Walker/Guthrie off Hennepin and Douglas)

Jointly sponsored by MISF and University of Minnesota
Department of Cultural Studies and Comparative
Literature; University of Minnesota Elder Learning
Institute; Hamline University, Department of Philosophy;
and the First Unitarian Society.

For more information contact
Dr. Tom P. Abeles at 612-823-3154 or tabeles@attglobal.net

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Preliminary Announcement

20th Anniversary Celebration and Annual Meeting
Saturday, November 16, 2002, 9:30 A.M. to 2:00 P.M.
St. Anthony Main Event Centre
219 Main Street Southeast, Minneapolis, MN 55414

Please join us on November 16 at historic St. Anthony
Main. Cheryl Dickson, recently retired Director of the MN
Humanities Commission, and one of the founders of MISF
is the keynote speaker. Her talk, "Someone Had to Do
Something!" is about the beginnings of MISF and the
importance of humanities. Morgan Gayce Willow will
read from her poems. Lionel Davis will perform an original
recorder solo and talk about its origins in synagogue trad-
tion. Awards and stories from twenty years of MISF histo-
ry will follow. Watch your mail for an updated agenda.

Be sure to get in on the fun—mark your calendars now.
Cost is $13.75 per person and includes continental break-
fast and box lunch of your choice (chicken, ham, roast beef or
fresh veggie). Please RSVP to Alice Schroeder by e-mail at
ams55303@msn.com or call her at 763-753-5695.

Help us celebrate our history. What is your favorite story
about MISF? How would you complete the sentence, "If it
weren't for MISF, I would not have been able to..." Who
would you nominate for an award? Please send stories, tes-
timonials and nominations to Alice Schroeder. Winning
entries will be read at the annual meeting.