Marginalia no. 32

Merrill-Cazier Library
Utah State University

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We stand at a notable moment in the history of human communication. We look back on a long history, and we look forward to an unknown future transformed by digital technology. Though we do not know what the future holds, we can look back through history and document how texts and books have changed, and perhaps find some indications of the tenor and significance of the change we are witnessing today.

The first, and many would say the most significant event in the history of human communication, was the invention of language. This of course was an iterative process that took many centuries to develop into the sophisticated system that we recognize as language. And with language comes the ability to create a “text,” that entity discussed by literary critics and historians divorced from any physical entity such as a book. Thus we might discuss “Hamlet” as a text that exists in some other intellectual space beyond the printed page. Text is a useful concept for us as we consider the transformation of the printed page; and what of text in the period before writing, before the invention of the alphabet? Text existed in the mind in memory. Homer composed his epics—the Iliad and the Odyssey—without the aid of writing, and these texts lived in human memory, passed down through generations. This was possible because the texts had poetic form that enabled and enhanced memorization. Poetry has its origin in this period of oral culture.

Writing represents language in a physical form, and for us in the West this is alphabetic. Writing must take form on some surface, such as the clay of a cuneiform tablet. Writing in ancient Sumeria developed to record the most mundane things such as business and governmental records and rarely the epic poems of authors like Homer. Prose had its origin in this period of the written text. As texts increased in length, new structures were developed to accommodate them. In the ancient world the scroll or roll was ubiquitous, but by the 4th century AD, the codex — what we know as the book — became the dominant form for recording written texts. Of course with the invention of printing in the 15th century, the text became fixed on the page and this form has remained dominant up until the present time.

Now with text in digital form, have we returned in a way to the Homeric age of text divorced from a physical form? Yes and no. Text has become unfixed (as in the time before the invention of writing), but it can only exist with the appearance of printed text in a digital environment. There are those who would suggest that this is not an improvement, but there were those who said the same thing about the invention of writing. With each transformation we lose something, but gain more. What we have now is digital text in a container. It is a dynamic container that may be as limited as a Kindle e-reader (which simply repurposes printed text to a digital page), an iPad tablet which has more capabilities, or a laptop computer which has even more potential. But in any case we haven’t yet seen the container that will hold the new digital book. It’s coming, but we just don’t know what it will look like yet.

“What happens when the reading experience catches up with new technologies?” This was a question posed by Duane Bray recently at the last American Library Association meeting—and it is a good question. We know from history that form, or now the container, shapes the nature of the text. The digital environment will alter the text in ways we can only dimly perceive. But perhaps a better question is “What happens when authorship catches up with new technologies?” At that point we will have crossed into completely new territory. We don’t know what form the book will take.
The exhibit, 30 Years of USU in Space Exploration, which was displayed in the atrium from May to September, was a tribute to the students who were members of the Get Away Special (GAS) team through the years. On display was an array of images, experiments, news clippings and videos from Utah State University’s student-based club, the Get Away Special Program. Established in 1976 when NASA announced the opportunity for space research to be included aboard space shuttle flights, the program has touched the academic careers of many USU students.

The idea of an exhibit began with Betty Rozum, associate dean for technical services, and Andrew Wesolek, scholarly communication librarian, as they worked with the current GAS team to upload its materials to the university’s institutional repository, Digital Commons. As Rozum and Wesolek worked with the team they discovered that GAS held a significant print archive that would be well suited as holdings for University Libraries’ Special Collections and Archives. Digital Commons and Special Collections and Archives are continuing to work with GAS members to acquire the rest of their holdings as well as processing materials, making them available for researchers.

Patrick Williams
USU Public Relations and Marketing

“the inspirational value of the space program is probably of far greater importance to education than any input of dollars...a whole generation is growing up which has been attracted to the hard disciplines of science and engineering by the romance of space.”

The Friends of the Library recently purchased two wonderful items for the Special Collections and Archives Division: an artist’s book by Carol Norby featuring the poem “How Everything Happens (Based on the Study of a Wave)” copyright 1967 May Swenson; and a collection of eighteen 19th and early 20th century western travel brochures and souvenir booklets, early travelogues of journeys to Yellowstone, Salt Lake City, and Thermopolis Wyoming, as well as first hand descriptions of the great train lines like the Union Pacific, Central Pacific, Oregon Shortline and the Denver and Rio Grande railways.

Brad Cole  
Associate Dean of Special Collections

Carol Norby’s artist book will be featured in a May Swenson exhibition in the Spring of 2013.

The Human Library concept originated in Denmark in 2000 as a way to reduce prejudice. From there the idea spread, and now there are more than 50 events each year in countries from China to Greece. More information on Human Libraries can be found on the international organization’s web site: http://humanlibrary.org. The Merrill-Cazier Library is in the process of determining when its next Human Library event will be. Watch for an announcement—you too can read a Human Book!

Anne Hedrich,  
Merrill Library Reference Librarian

Human Library

Find out the rest of the story

The Human Library ~ don’t judge a book by its cover

If you could talk to a book, what questions would you ask? This past September readers had a chance to talk to books, human books, when the Merrill-Cazier Library held its second Human Library event. In a Human Library, people are the books that are checked out by readers, and a check out is a conversation. The library provides human books with a variety of backgrounds, experiences, religions, occupations, conditions, ethnicities and nationalities.

This past event titles ranged from “Conversations over Chemo Cocktails” on surviving cancer to “Balancing Act: Mexican/American, Catholic/LDS,” being raised in a diverse household.

Participants, both books and readers, often begin by being a little nervous: what will it be like to talk with an unknown person about topics that can be quite personal? But after just a minute or two, the conversation is rolling and the 30 minute checkout goes by quickly. Books and readers alike have been enthusiastic about their experience.

Human books are not experts in their topics, but rather in their experiences with their topics. Each 30 minute check out is unique depending on the combination of the interests and personalities of the book and reader.

Brad Cole  
Associate Dean of Special Collections

Carol Norby’s artist book will be featured in a May Swenson exhibition in the Spring of 2013.

Artist’s statement: “each telescoping interior section contains a line from the poem and was created to give the sense of waves building and releasing. The poem was the determinate for the structure.”  
Carol Norby

Marginalia
becky thoms ~ copyright librarian

Becky, our new Copyright Librarian, hails from the state where the gophers are golden (Minnesota) from the small town of Villard. She had a unique childhood. Her family owned a small “resort,” the smaller old-fashioned family kind that consisted of camping and cabins on a small lake. All of the kids in her large family helped run the resort, doing whatever was needed to keep things going smoothly. Although her father had several other jobs, her parents joined her grandparents in running the resort because they thought it was a good way for kids to grow up, and Becky thought they made a great choice.

Becky has worked in several corporate library/information positions. She comes to us from ICON Health and Fitness where she was the Intellectual Property Assistant. There she worked with copyright, patent, and trademark documents. Before that she was the sole librarian at IEM, a company that deals in emergency management. Becky received her MA in Library and Information Science from the University of Iowa in 2007.

Becky enjoys being outside and likes to walk the 2.5 miles to work every day. She is an international traveler and loves to read.

electronic collections librarian ~ katie wesolek

Katie was born and raised in southern New Jersey, not far from Philadelphia. She earned a BA in English from Bucknell University in Pennsylvania and received her MLIS from Rutgers University in New Jersey. She spent a few years working with unruly teenagers in a high school library before she managed to escape to the warmer climes of academia, where she is much happier in her role as Electronic Collections Librarian. Katie manages the library’s electronic subscriptions, oversees the acquisition of new electronic material, and strives to educate the University community about our resources.

In her spare time, Katie enjoys going to Yoga and Pilates classes, hiking, cooking, and reading.
October 4-6, 2012 the Utah State University Department of English and USU Libraries’ Special Collections and Archives (SCA) were honored to host the Jack London Society’s 11th biennial symposium. SCA approached the Society about holding their meeting in Logan two years ago, and because USU holds the second largest Jack London book and manuscript collection in the world, it was a natural fit. London scholars from all over the world descended on the Riverwoods Conference Center in Logan for conference sessions. Presentations included "Jack London and the Snark: Sailing into Trouble," "Jack London State Historical Park: A Visual Update," "Turning Points, Debates, and Promising New Directions in London Studies," as well as “London’s Gendering of Nature and the Formulation of Masculine Identity” by USU’s very own Paul Crumbley. In the rugged spirit of Jack London, attendees also ventured outdoors to try their hand at fly fishing at the Paradise Trout Camp.

In conjunction with the symposium, USU Libraries staff installed a Jack London exhibit in the atrium of the Merrill-Cazier Library. Manuscript curator Clint Pumphrey gave an accompanying gallery talk. The exhibit, on display through December 15, represents a very small sampling of the Jack and Charmian London book and manuscript collections housed in Special Collections and Archives. The curators’ intention for the exhibit was to highlight items from the London holdings that are particularly unique and deal with themes in London’s life that might interest students, faculty, symposium attendees, and other visitors to the library. Themes include Jack London’s socialist politics, his allegedly romantic relationship with collaborator Anna Strunsky, and a trip he took across the United States—with a stop in Utah along the way.

Perhaps the greatest moment of the symposium was when attendees ventured down to the lower level to view the London collection in Special Collections. There, Society President Noël Mauberret paged through a magazine sales book that he had never seen and eagerly requested photocopies so that he could use the item in his research. Judging by the excitement in the reading room, he wasn’t the only scholar to find something that was previously unknown. All during the conference and in the weeks following, SCA received numerous compliments about the collection, the exhibit, and the hospitality attendees experienced while at USU. They are already talking about returning to Logan for a future symposium! As for the SCA staff, they learned a great deal from hosting the conference, helping researchers, and curating the exhibit, and hope to use this knowledge to better assist patrons with the London collection in the future.

For everyone involved it’s safe to say that the Jack London Society’s 11th biennial symposium was a smashing success!

Clint Pumphrey
Manuscript Curator, Special Collections
Presentations:


Publications:


ultimately take in the new digital age, and perhaps, given the dynamic nature of the
digital medium, it will never take a fixed form analogous to the codex book we are
so familiar with. But as university presses and libraries come together to experi-
ment and explore possibilities in the creation and production of scholarly mono-
graphs, some things are already clear.

We are all aware that university presses in the U.S. have long been at risk as schol-
arly monographs have become progressively less profitable. At the same time, the
role of the scholarly monograph in the tenure and promotion system has become
progressively more important. University presses have been trapped in a difficult
situation and have often been marginalized in terms of local campus politics. The
result has been to close presses. Our experience here at USU has been that bringing
the press into the administrative structure of the library has allowed the press to
align its own mission to the library’s mission, and to move from the margin to the
center.

Further, this administrative positioning of the press within the library has enabled
both the press and the library to collaborate on experimentation on new forms for
scholarly monographs, drawing on the strengths of both organizations. This col-
laborative structure has given the press and library a collective space for risk-taking
and exploring new models. We don’t know where these new models may lead but
we are actively exploring the possibilities and looking to the future with great
anticipation.

Richard W. Clement, Dean of Libraries
[From remarks delivered to the ETD 2012 Conference, Lima, Peru, September, 2012]
Friends of Merrill-Cazier Library presented its fall lecture Thursday, Oct. 25, 2013. Featured speakers were Edwin Stafford and Cathy Hartman, marketing professors and directors for the Center for the Market Diffusion of Renewable Energy and Clean Technology at the Jon M. Huntsman School of Business at USU.

For their presentation, Stafford and Hartman screened the documentary “Wind Uprising,” and provided updates on current issues facing wind energy on the national, regional and local levels, including Cache Valley and USU.

These two marketing professors have collaborated on research on energy and clean technology and sustainable entrepreneurship since 1995. As founding members of the Utah Department of Natural Resource’s Wind Working Group in 2003, Stafford and Hartman helped kick-start Utah’s wind industry through marketing initiatives and economic analyses on how local wind development would create job opportunities and property tax revenues for schools and rural communities.

In collaboration with Michelle Nunez of Green Tech Films, they produced the award-winning documentary “Wind Uprising,” which tells the story of Utah’s four-year struggle to establish its first wind power project at the mouth of Spanish Fork Canyon. The story is told through the eyes of the entrepreneurs, policymakers, citizens and advocates who made it happen. Stafford and Hartman’s academic research documents the barriers and issues facing clean energy development in Utah to uncover “lessons learned.”