The Arts & Humanities Special Interest Group of the American Society for Information Science in the 1980s: A Memoir

by Ralph Dumain

This is a story of my participation in ASIS (I will refer to the organization by its old acronym, as I have not been a member since some time before its name was changed) in the 1980s, from my vantage point as an officer in various capacities including chairman of the Arts and Humanities Special Interest group (SIG/AH). That was a different world: microcomputers were still a relative novelty with a minuscule capacity by today's standards. The 360K floppy disk was the standard storage medium; a couple years later a 10 MG hard drive would seem like a paradise. The Osborne portable computer was yet to appear. There were no CDs or DVDs, no Internet for the common person, no broadband access for communications, no cell phones, with all that this technology would imply for economic, social, and cultural life.

1982-1983

I joined ASIS in 1982 and attended my first annual meeting in Columbus, Ohio. The meeting itself was stimulating, but there was something in the air about Columbus—I felt it the minute I crossed the city line on my way in—that depressed me. I must have stayed in Columbus a few extra days. What I remember most is that I found the atmosphere so depressing, I couldn't wait to return to . . . Buffalo!

AH and Classification Research (CR) were the first SIGs I joined, followed eventually by others. As months wore on, AH seemed to be inactive, as I never received a newsletter. On May 23, 1983 I wrote a letter to Jan Krcmar, officially the Secretary of SIG/AH, complaining about this inactivity, and received a response dated May 30. She offered some suggestions for participation and forwarded my letter to SIG/AH chairman Karen Meizner. (While terminological conventions have undergone change, we always used the term "chairman" whether a male or female occupied the position.) I wrote Karen directly on June 9 with a list of ideas and suggestions. Karen did not have time to write back until September 11. She had joined ASIS the same time I did. Apparently, few people were involved in SIG/AH, everyone was too busy to work on it in their spare time, the newsletter editor had to quit, and Karen was left to take care of everything. She suggested I attend the business meeting at the annual meeting and get involved to keep SIG/AH alive. I responded on September 19, questioning the raison d'être of the SIG and indicating my intention to participate in the annual meeting in Washington. In her follow-up letter of September 28, she mentioned that she had been led to believe that SIG/AH existed only for the purpose of organizing some program at the annual meeting, and welcomed my offer to participate as an officer.

A three-page Fall 1983 *SIG/AH Newsletter* finally appeared, headed by an announcement of a program in the annual meeting, a panel on computer applications in museums. The Newsletter Editor was apparently Al Stewart, for whom a replacement was needed. The newsletter also included a short list of books of interest and a list of items for which reviews were sought. The third page was a questionnaire on projects and activities for members to fill out.

1983-1984

At the annual meeting, a roster of officers was elected for the year 1983-1984. I became the Chairman-Elect, which committed me for two years, as I would become Chairman for the following year. I believe it was also a custom for the Chairman-Elect to be the Program Chairman for SIG/AH-sponsored

sessions at ASIS meetings unless someone else was so appointed. The new newsletter editor Katherine Haskins had to resign her post, so I became Newsletter Editor as well.

So, aside from the three positions I took up, the new officers consisted of Karen Meizner (Chairman), Shannon K. Macioroski (Secretary-Treasurer), and Margaret S. Jennings (Cabinet Representative).

I produced my first newsletter, a three-page Spring 1984 issue, in April of that year. The technology of that time was still primitive as compared to today. I had to get a special 11" x 14" blueline paper from ASIS headquarters, print out the master newsletter copy onto it (the dot-matrix printer was still standard, and there were much slower typewriter-like printers for best-quality text), and send the master copy back to ASIS for reduction to letter size paper, mass duplication, and mailing. The Spring 1984 newsletter showed the signs of a practice I initiated, doing outreach and forging liaisons with related organizations and publications, in this case the Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH). I also wrote a book review of *Computing and the Humanities: Papers from the Fifth International Conference on Computing in the Humanities, Ann Arbor, Michigan, May 1981*. The newsletter detailed our programs for the upcoming mid-year and annual meetings.

Microcomputers still constituted a fresh, evolving technology in 1984, and all were working on developing applications in their collections and areas of research. It was natural then that the mid-year meeting taking place at Indiana University at Bloomington May 20-23 would have the theme "The Micro Revolution: Implications for the Information Age." There was a plethora of "how I done it" presentations. SIG/AH's session was "Microcomputers in the Arts and Humanities," organized by Karen Markey.

I reported on this extensively in my Summer 1984 newsletter, which was published in September. My correspondence reveals that in the interim I engaged in much outreach activity and, per acknowledgment of Karen Meizner, I had already practically taken over the chief organizational responsibilities and was effecting the revivification of SIG/AH. I see that Shannon Macioroski was quite pro-active in her Treasurer capacity.

The mid-year SIG/AH presentations of Eileen Fry (Microcomputers, Databases, and the Humanities; Customized Access to Specific Information) and Lawrence McCrank (Computerized Medievalia) are summarized in the summer newsletter. Thomas Ohlgren and William I. Bormann were unable to present their how-I-done-it project, so I stepped in with mine, "Using dBase II to Create a Thesaurus, Bibliographic Database, and Information Retrieval System for the Philosophy of Science." My presentation was forgettable, even to me, as I remember more about discussing the nuts and bolts of how I used dBase II than the actual structure of my philosophy of science thesaurus, which presented more intellectually interesting problems.

I cannot recall all the how-I-done-it presentations, but I remember one session in which someone demonstrated Xerox's pioneering graphical user interface, which was a novelty, as command-line operating systems like DOS were the norm. (I see that the Macintosh was introduced the same year, but I don't recall being aware of it in May.)

I added reports of other sessions of relevance to SIG/AH. I made acquaintance with Paul Tutwiler, whose session on "Microcomputers as Philosophical Tools" covered not only organization and retrieval of philosophical references, research, and writing, but revealed Tutwiler's ambition to advance metaphilosophy via artificial intelligence and other computer-aided methods of analyzing and comparing the structures of philosophical systems. I started a correspondence with Tutwiler following this meeting.

I also reported extensively on Leota Sigrid's paper "Will the Microcomputer Revolution Destroy Document Evolution?" and "The Effect of Word Processing on Writing" by John A. Cross and Bob J. Curey.

I also reported on a man I was pleased to see as keynote speaker, a pioneer of artificial intelligence, Joseph Weizenbaum. Weizenbaum, having noted how easily people mistook machines for being human, became alarmed and ended up writing the book *Computer Power and Human Reason: From Judgment to Calculation* (1967), in which he also skewered amoral technocrats like behaviorist B. F. Skinner, who was to author the notorious *Beyond Freedom and Dignity*. Given the gung-ho attitude that naturally accrued to the ethos of ASIS, I was glad to see a prominent representative of social conscience issue caveats about the hyped technological future. As you will see shortly, this proved to be a major issue for me.

My participation in the mid-year meeting also gave me the opportunity to interview for the job that was to get me out of Buffalo.

My summer 1984 newsletter was a 7½-page extravaganza. (Newsletters would be folded in three and stapled shut so that the bottom third of the last page could be used for the mailing address and metered postage.) I have already mentioned the mid-year meeting reports, and the newsletter contains a conspectus of the annual meeting to come, which I shall report on later. The newsletter also included calls for officer nominations, contributions, recruitment efforts, and responses to our questionnaire. I listed my own ideas for future conference programs, which I was to implement in the course of my remaining active years in SIG/AH. I issued a call for revision of our mission statement. I called for reports on humanities software and myself reported on PHILDICT, a spelling checker for philosophy. I also reported on and established a newsletter exchange with *SCOPE: Scholarly Communication Online Publishing and Education*. I also compiled two short bibliographies, one listing some new books and the other on philosophical, social, and humanistic issues regarding computers. I reviewed *Writing with a Word Processor* by William Zinsser, a popular writer on the subject. My list of coming attractions also is an indicator of my ambitions for SIG/AH.

There is one more item in the newsletter to highlight: my hypertext bibliography. Nobody (except insiders, presumably) heard of hypertext in 1984, and it was implemented only experimentally. My bibliography consisted of only eight items! Little did I suspect how rapidly this would change, how both the literature and commercial applications would explode soon afterward. Too bad I wasn't in a position to cash in on this boom!

I went into high gear in organizing a program for the annual meeting. My session on "Bibliometric Studies in the Humanities and Social Sciences," co-sponsored with the Behavioral and Social Sciences SIG (SIG/BSS), reflects my long-standing interest in what can be done with bibliometrics in the humanities, but also my practice of cutting across existing invisible colleges to seek out people doing work of interest who may not be found in one another's scholarly networks or even disciplines. Virginia M. Doland was a feminist scholar in an English department, not in information science at all. She didn't know what biblioemtrics was, but I sent her a bibliography and solicited her for a paper, "Portrait of the Critic as a Journal Reader: A Study of Readership Patterns Among Literary Scholars." Miranda Lee Pao was active in ASIS, and I got her along with Laurie S. McCreery to contribute a "Bibliometric Analysis of Ethnomusicology." Katherine W. McCain, also active in ASIS, contributed "Mapping The Intellectual Structure of Macroeconomics." Finally, there was Virgil P. Diodato's paper, "The Impact and

Scholarliness of Book Reviews: A Citation Analysis in the Arts and Humanities." Howard D. White served as moderator.

Robert F. Barnes organized our other program, also co-sponsored with SIG/BSS, and was one of the panelists. Virtual reality was unheard of in 1984, but Myron Krueger, author of the recently published book *Artificial Reality*, was tapped to deliver a plenary address. We supplemented that address with our program "More Thoughts on 'Artificial Reality': Humanistic Perspectives On Human-Machine Interaction," featuring panelists Thomas Haynes, Ricardo Viera, George Shortess, and Myron Krueger, with Barnes as moderator and me as reactor. I believe there was also an exhibit or demonstration of Krueger's experimental technology, but I missed it.

If you look at the program description I wrote, you will see a list of negatives, indicating my own predisposition toward the subject. I do not recall other panelists raising those issues or expressing doubts, but I approached the subject with undisguised hostility. Note the reading list attached to the session description in our newsletter and in the *Proceedings*. In it you will see not only Weizenbaum's book, but books detailing other matters of concern, particularly *The Conquest of Will* by Abbe Mowshowitz, *The Rise of the Computer State* by David Burnham, *Electronic Nightmare: The Home Communications Set and Your Freedom* by John Wicklein, and *What Computers Can't Do* by Hubert L. Dreyfus. I have a thick file on this subject, with notes on the varied literature I consulted as well as on Krueger's book. While many of the possible applications of the new technology are intriguing and some positive, I could not abide the rosy view of the technocratic utopia depicted in the book, which I viewed as socially irresponsible. I am not going to detail my pages and pages of objections, but this was 1984, and the future I saw was a dystopian one. Without detailing which applications and predictions have or have not come to pass, note this general prediction, which is very contemporary:

> During the balance of this century responsive technology will move ever closer to us, becoming the standard interface through which we gain most of our experience. It will intercede in our personal relationships and between us and our tools. (1983 ed., p. 207)

Nobody knew what I as reactor was going to say, and when I did speak, I accentuated the negative, to Barnes's visible displeasure. Krueger took it all in very good humor. As for audience response, I recall one hostile reaction to me from one woman, to whom I gave an equally sharp reply.

Following the session, several people gave me a friendly enough reception. Whatever I said was apparently no skin off their noses. Curiously, all of the people who objected to or resented my presentation were women. I remember this quite clearly. If there is any inference to be made concerning this fact, I will leave it to you.

Well, I didn't put people to sleep, and there's nothing like controversy to keep people interested. This may have been the reason that someone with a post in ASIS—this may have been Barbara Flood, the Conference Chairman—suggested I get more administratively involved in ASIS.

As Chairman of the SIG, I attended the appropriate ASIS business meetings at conferences. I think that on one such occasion at this annual meeting, I was nominated for some post by our Cabinet Representative Margaret Jennings, at which one attendee—omnipresent at ASIS meetings—I recall her generally hyperactive body language and energetic dancing at the official dinner party—made a contrary facial gesture. Somebody else was voted in, but as I didn't seek whatever position this was, I was not disappointed.

All the panelists in the "Artificial Reality" session were taken to lunch at ASIS's expense. As I was in the habit of writing people following meetings to thank them, I wrote Krueger a gracious letter emphasizing positive applications of his ideas.

I should mention two other facets of these semiannual conferences. An independent contractor recorded all conference sessions using a now-obsolete technology—cassette tapes. I do not know whether any recordings have since been transferred to a current storage medium, but I purchased tapes of all the SIG/AH sessions I attended.

I don't know about my predecessors, but, on the advice of others, I established the practice of taking all our invited speakers (except for the Artificial Reality session) out to lunch, charged to SIG/AH's budget. After several years of doing this, when I was on the verge of retiring from managing SIG/AH's affairs, I was told this practice was not necessary. But there it is.

Another feature of the 1984 annual meeting that made it exceptional was the Philadelphia-style dinner party. This was not the customary banquet format. Instead, carts were set up around the periphery of the banquet hall, and the participants could stroll from one station to another to sample Philadelphia's delights, which included Philly cheese steaks and frozen chocolate-covered bananas. The center of the hall was available for dancing, of which there was much.

All in all, this meeting was a terrific experience, one of the two most memorable for me. I visited Philadelphia a few times for conferences in the early 1980s. I even dreamed about moving there, as I always enjoyed my visits. Approximately a quarter century earlier, I had lived there as an infant, from which I retained two visual memories—the streetcars and the 30th Street train station. This time I stayed in a cheap hotel run by the Father Divine mission, a relic of a bygone era. The day after the ASIS meeting ended, I had an interview for a library job in Philadelphia. By that time I was so exhausted, I could barely keep awake and alert for the interview. I didn't get that job; it was a job in the Baltimore area that finally got me out of Buffalo.

1984-1985

The SIG/AH business meeting yielded two new officers. Elizabeth Davis became Chairman-Elect. The Secretary-Treasurer office was split into two offices. Shannon Macioriski remained Treasurer. Renee Gelinas became Secretary. I was now Chairman and still the Newsletter Editor. Margaret Jennings continued as Cabinet Representative.

I was not to attend another ASIS meeting for another two years, but I continued to organize conference programs. It appears that my subsequent newsletter was not ready until the following October; this 5½-page issue was dated Fall 1984-Summer 1985. In the interim I underwent changes in location and occupation, ending up in Washington, DC. While these disruptions had their effect, I was not idle regarding SIG/AH. All the while between the appearance of the previous newsletter and this one I was active organizing our program for the 1985 annual meeting and pursuing outreach activities.

This newsletter records no SIG/AH program for the mid-year meeting in Fort Lauderdale, May 19-22, with the theme "Telecommunications and Networking: Supplying the Missing Link," nor does the conference program itself.

I stepped up my outreach activities immediately following the 1984 annual meeting. I contacted known organizations and publications and canvassed other information science related organizations for arts and humanities connections. Some are well-known organizations or publications of long standing, others smaller and less formal groups which may or may not still exist. Examples are the Association for Computers and the Humanities (ACH, with its *ACH Newsletter)*, Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), Centre for Computing in the Humanities (University of Toronto), Philosophers' Computer Network, *Philosophers' Computing Newsletter*, *Research in Word Processing Newsletter*, Society for Conceptual and Content Analysis by Computer (SCCAC). Not all of these efforts produced permanent results, but several resulted in long-term relationships with organizations, publications, and/or individuals associated with them. The exchange of newsletters, e.g. with *Research in Word Processing Newsletter* and the *SCCAC Newsletter* (particularly with SCCAC representative Klaus Schmidt), proved to be fruitful. Announcements in the former and in the *ACH Newsletter*, along with other outreach efforts, yielded many inquiries (including some for expert advice) from non-ASIS-members. We gained participants for SIG/AH programs from these interchanges as well.

SIG/AH has long co-sponsored conference sessions with other SIGs, partly due to my efforts, along with, in some cases, my membership in other SIGs. My other SIG of greatest interest was Classification Research (SIG/CR). I also corresponded with individuals encountered at ASIS meetings on matters of intellectual interest, e.g. with Joseph Busch via SIG/CR.

I organized two programs, co-sponsored by SIG/CR for the 1985 annual meeting in Las Vegas, October 20-24, both reflecting my long-term interests. One concerns personal information systems, which involve special concerns in the organization of information that differ from impersonal public repositories of publications and other documents. Hence my session on "Personal Databases, Online Organization of Text, and the Future of Scholarly Work." My long-term collaboration with T. R. Girill of the Lawrence Livermore Laboratory began with his interest in my unfinished philosophy of science thesaurus project, and we continued to correspond. Per my invitation he contributed a paper to this session, "Narration, Hierarchy, and Autonomy: The Problem of Online Text Structure." Bradford A. Morgan and James M. Schwartz, editors of the *Research in Word Processing Newsletter*, contributed a paper on "Microcomputer Software for the Scholar: Needs vs. Achievements." The third contribution came from Sidney Robbins: "Information Resource Management Potential Using New Microcomputer Based Bibliographic and Textual Database Management Systems."

"Content Analysis" is a field in itself, with origins in studies of mass communications and political propaganda, also in the study of literary texts. It involves the application of statistical techniques for teasing out the not always ostensible information content of prose texts. This has a history separate from that of subject indexing and classification, but why not access this field for possible relevance to subject analysis for information retrieval and the organization of free-form text? The people working on content analysis in the humanities were concentrated in the Association for Computers and the Humanities rather than in ASIS. From there I recruited Sally Yeates Sedelow for "Computational Literary Thematic Analysis: The Possibility of a General Solution" and Walter A. Sedelow for "Semantics for Humanities Applications: Context and Significance of Semantic 'Stores'." Klaus M. Schmidt (contacted via SCCAC) addressed a fundamental issue of interest to us both: "Can There Be a Symbiosis Between Natural Language Meaning And Concept? Conceptual Analysis In The Humanities."

The Fall 1984-Summer 1985 *SIG/AH Newsletter* also contained a message from Chair-Elect Elizabeth Davis, including suggestions, ideas, solicitations of ideas, and a report on the SIG Cabinet meeting at the 1985 mid-year meeting.

The newsletter included a call for re-writing the SIG's mission statement.

I also issued a call for proposals for the 1986 mid-year and annual meetings. I also announced my intention to create a blockbuster program devoted to philosophy for the 50th annual meeting in 1987.

1985-1986

My records for this membership year are scanty. My sole organizational role for this period was as Newsletter Editor. I cannot find a finished newsletter; I have only a huge draft for the projected 1986 newsletter (which see). Elizabeth Davis took over as Chairman for this period. I can't be certain of the other officers, but I see that a committee consisting of Davis, John Leide and Ellen Sleeter was formed to organize a detailed survey of the SIG/AH membership.

I have no material concerning the mid-year meeting. The annual meeting was held in Chicago on September 28 – October 2, 1986. SIG/AH had two conference sessions: "Interactive Videodisc Technology in Research, Education and Training" (co-sponsored with SIG/ED) and "Music: Manipulative Medium" (co-sponsored with SIG/BSS). The music session was organized and moderated by June Andel, who was to play a significant role in SIG/AH. Speakers covered a range of subjects, from information theory to the manufacture of Muzak. Though I did not attend this annual meeting, I recall an interchange, perhaps with Elizabeth Davis, who spoke about the information content in Shoenberg's music, concerning Bach and the hierarchical organization of musical structure.

So while others took care of organizational matters, I spent the bulk of this membership year compiling information. I was, judging from my personal SIG/AH 1986 report of September 25, dissatisfied with certain aspects of ASIS, both organizational and monetary (membership benefits viz. the high cost of participation, including costs of attending meetings). My report also included my proposal for the 1987 annual meeting, my ideas for future conference programs, publications, and collaborative efforts, and my proposed change of mission statement.

1986-1987

I was once again Chairman-Elect and Conference Program Chairman. Elizabeth Davis and June Andel produced a 5-page newsletter dated April 1987, consisting of a detailed report of the SIG/AH sessions at the 1986 annual meeting in Chicago, descriptions of related organizations and their activities, and an announcement of the upcoming annual meeting. This is the only newsletter I have for the year. I have no information about the 1987 mid-year meeting, so apparently we did not contribute to it.

1987 was a landmark year for ASIS and for SIG/AH. The ASIS 50th Anniversary Conference was held in Boston, October 4-8, and SIG/AH contributed mightily to it. This was the high point of my participation in the organization of conference programs, exceeding in magnitude that of 1984.

June Andel organized and moderated a session (co-sponsored with SIG/BSS) inspired by H. G. Wells's 1937 work *World Brain*: "Midwifing the 'World Brain'," commemorating its 50th anniversary and featuring current implementations of the idea and future prospects. An eminent roster of speakers was gathered for this program, headed by H. J. Abraham Goodman, who traced the history of the concept and its implementation and his project REGISTER III affiliated with the World Mind Group. Manfred Kochen discussed his WISE project. Eugene Garfield of the Institute for Scientific Information (ISI) discussed the topic for which he is best known, the contribution of citation indexing to universal

bibliographic control, with a look back to Vannevar Bush's Memex concept. Glynn Harmon spoke about expert systems and artificial intelligence. Parker Rossman addressed the issue of power vs. generality in artificial intelligence. Carnegie Mellon's General Problem Solver, which is comparable to Wells's vision, exemplifies the difficulties in constructing a universal system, while workable expert systems have been restricted to narrowly delimited knowledge domains. Rossman outlined how a combination of both approaches might be applied to the problem of war.

George Vladutz of ISI (formerly of the USSR's VINITI) was scheduled to speak on "The 'World Brain' Today: The Scientographic Approach to Knowledge Representation," but he disappeared from the final program (unless he was added at the last minute and thus was not mentioned in the printed program or *Proceedings*). Mapping the "geography of science" via scientometrics could prove to be a more workable approach to knowledge engineering than the traditional AI approach to knowledge representation.

My three-pronged program on philosophy was the culmination of a project that began with my participation in SIG/AH. The issue of information retrieval is of obvious interest to the philosopher, perhaps even more so to the non-academic or amateur philosopher whose interests do not follow the paths traced out by invisible college networks, or to the sociologist of knowledge who wishes to ascertain how different tendencies and programs cluster in view of ascertaining overall "progress" of a field in which progress itself is at issue.

When I first moved to Washington I became interested in the topic of "philosophical style," the literature about which was written by philosophers or others working on the conjunction of philosophy and literature. Taking up an interest in content analysis, I wondered what information content (related to that elusive notion of "aboutness") could be yielded by the application of content analysis techniques to philosophical texts, whose style can range from the austere rigor of symbolic logic to the purely literary, beyond propositional argumentation.

My first session, in which I served as a panelist, was "The Philosophy Professions and Information," covering the information-seeking behavior and information retrieval aspects of professional philosophical research, sociology of knowledge concerns (including the application of bibliometrics), and the institutional and career aspects of the philosophical profession. Long-standing contributor T. R. Girill and professional philosopher Donald Sievert comprised the other two panelists. Presumably my role was to propose the initial and follow-up questions.

I also moderated my second session, "Subject Access, Content Analysis & Philosophical Analysis." Mary Ellen Sievert's contribution was a study of "Information Retrieval in Philosophy," in which she tested the retrieval effectiveness of *Philosopher's Index*, *Arts & Humanities Citation Index*, *Humanities Index,* and *FRANCIS-H*, and *Mathfile* with a separate set of test searches.

The other topic of this session illustrates my practice of going not only beyond the invisible college structure of information science, but way beyond the boundaries of the information profession. Thanks to information gleaned from the newsletter of the Philosophers' Computer Network, I contacted Profs. Andrew Burgess and Alastair McKinnon of the Dept. of Philosophy of McGill University, who were using quantitative techniques to analyze the philosophical texts of Søren Kierkegaard. Burgess had a 50-page paper ready for me to peruse: "A Word-Experiment on the Category of the Comic." 50 pages is much too extensive a paper for publication in the *Proceedings*, so I urged him to write a more condensed version or simply submit an abstract for publication and discuss the full paper. Burgess was listed in the conference program. My archive has holes in it, so I don't know exactly what happened, but apparently

whatever Burgess submitted was rejected for publication in the *Proceedings* as being outside the scope of information science concerns. Burgess withdrew from the program.

McKinnon's paper "Mappng the Shape of an Argument" was accepted and published in the *Proceedings*, so he represented the Kierkegaard research program at the annual meeting. McKinnon's project interested me from the standpoints of both philosophical argument and information science. McKinnon stressed that the use of automated quantitative techniques was no substitute for traditional philosophical analysis; however, such techniques could capture patterns in texts that otherwise elude conscious apprehension, and such patterns could be extracted to elucidate aspects of the structure of Kierkegaard's argumentation. (That such covert patterns could exist should not be surprising given the highly literary as opposed to straightforwardly logical presentation of Kierkegaard's ideas.)

My third session, "Philosophical Perspectives on Information Science," was moderated by Diana Woodward. Thomas J. Froehlich of Syracuse University surfaced in several meetings as one conscience of the information science profession. I believe he had an interest in Jurgen Habermas, the most influential member of the second generation of the Frankfurt School. (More on critical theory below.) On this occasion he spoke on "Social Epistemology and the Foundations of Information Science." David W. Ward presented on "Metaphysical Issues in Classification Theory." T. R. Girill contributed to this session as well with his presentation "Philosophical Aspects of Full-Text Online Databases."

1987-1988

In this membership year I served as SIG/AH Chairman and Alternate Cabinet Representative. David Bearman became Chair-Elect. Elizabeth Davis served as Secretary-Treasurer and June Andel as Newsletter Editor. June Andel took over the position of Cabinet Representative.

The 17th ASIS Mid-Year Meeting took place at Ann Arbor, Michigan, on May 15-18, 1988, with the theme "Artificial Intelligence: Expert Systems and Other Applications." SIG/AH offered two program sessions.

One SIG/AH program was "Inventing and Applying the Language of the Arts: From Thesauri to Semantic Networks, organized and moderated by David Bearman, attended by approximately 70 people. The contributors were Tony Petersen with "Constructing a Language of the Arts: Knowledge Representation in Thesauri" and Pat Molholt with "Employing a Language of the Arts: Navigating Semantic Networks and the Representation of Complex Relationships Beyond Those Captured in Thesauri."

June Andel continued to pursue the World Brain project, organizing and moderating the session "Midwifing the 'World Brain': Progress of Labor," attended by about 115 people. This time Manfred Kochen spoke on the future of automation at the Library of Congress, and Glynn Harmon spoke on "The Intelligent World Encyclopedia (CYC) Project at Microelectronics and Computer Technology Corporation." George Vladutz was able to participate this time; his topic was "(Dis)integrating Mechanisms in Current Information Activities." A new speaker, P. F. Anderson, presented on the topic "Analogy: Formation in Biological and Electronic Neural Nets."

I attended this meeting, my first mid-year since 1984. Afterward I wrote: "Far from being a dry technocratic program, this conference was a cornucopia for the humanist, especially the philosopher." These are some other programs that caught my attention: (1) "Artificial Intelligence and the Science of Information: Philosophical Issues" sponsored by SIG/FIS, moderated by Richard Diener, with speakers

Thomas J. Froehlich ("Some Reflections on Artificial Intelligence, Ideology, and the Foundations of Information Science"), R. J. Skovira, P. W. Dalrymple, and L. B. Heilprin. (2) "What Philosophers Say Intelligent Systems Should Not Do," sponsored by SIG/TIS, moderated by Diana Woodward, with speakers Terrence Erdt and Robert F. Barnes. (3) "The Basis for Choice" (SIG/IAE) featured three papers, of which I noted two: "Two Biological Metaphors for Synthetic Neural Systems" by William B. Dress, Jr. and "Evaluation and Evolution: The Problem of Choice" by Homer J. Hall. (4) "Issues in Expert Systems," moderated by Glynn Harmon, included two papers of interest, one of which I noted: "Proprietary Expert Systems: A Threat to Intellectual Freedom" by Diana Woodward.

June Andel produced our Spring 1988 newsletter, which included the *World Brain / World Mind Newsletter*. For this we received a commendation dated May 5 from Linda Resnik at ASIS headquarters.

I worked as guest editor on a draft of a June issue of our *Newsletter* but never finished it. A newsletter was published in September.

While our conference programs and newsletters are the visible manifestations of our efforts, there was much else in the way of outreach and planning going on behind the scenes. June Andel worked on recruiting new SIG/AH members within ASIS and established a liaison with the World Brain / World Mind Group. David Bearman recruited for ASIS and SIG/AH at conferences of the Museum Computer Network and the Society of American Archivists. Elizabeth Davis maintained a liaison with the Northeast Association for Computing in the Humanities. Member T. R. Girill was appointed to the nascent APA Committee on Computer Use in Philosophy. I continued to maintain and expand newsletter exchange efforts, adding the *Ontario Humanities Computing Newsletter* to the list.

June and I discussed options she was pursuing to publish a book on the World Brain project/concept, consisting of past or future papers. A special issue of *JASIS* was another possibility I brought up. I was most interested in Goodman's book in progress on the history of the World Brain concept.

I corresponded on matters of common interest with Ephraim Nissan of the Dept. of Mathematics and Computer Science at Ben Gurion University, also involved (as editor, I am now guessing) with the book series *Advances in Computing and the Humanities*. Nissan disclosed planned volumes for this series and discussed the potential market for a new humanities and information science periodical. I was invited to write an article for a volume in the series. Instead, I suggested publication of June's or Goodman's work on the World Brain.

SIG/AH members have also provided expert assistance when queried. I cited David Bearman in particular in my annual report.

As of July 31 we had a total of 222 members. The previous year SIG/AH had 136 individual and 118 institutional members.

The 1988 annual meeting was held in Atlanta. SIG/AH planned three sessions, on (1) Electronic Archives; (2) Issues in Art Information: Image-Text Integration; (3) What Philosophers Say Intelligent Systems Cannot Do (co-sponsored with SIG/FIS), organized by Diana Woodward. I did not attend the Atlanta meeting and have no more detailed information at hand.

At this point I did not wish to continue holding a leadership position in SIG/AH. On October 17 I completed a farewell message for publication and distribution, summing up my experience and

acknowledging the contributions of others to SIG/AH. My role in SIG/AH however was not over, as you shall see.

1988-1989

The slate of officers for this membership year consisted of: David Bearman (Chair & Alternate Cabinet Representative), Ellen Sleeter (Chair-Elect), Elizabeth Davis (Secretary-Treasurer), June Andel (Newsletter Editor & Cabinet Representative). In my farewell statement I mentioned also Terry Erdt assuming a leadership position, but I am not sure what it was; he may have become Treasurer. In my farewell statement I indicated my intention to develop conference programs for the coming year and possibly in future years, so I assumed a new position for 1988-1989 as Program Development Officer.

I have no records pertaining to the 1989 mid-year meeting. The theme of the 52nd Annual Meeting to be held in Washington, DC, October 30 - November 2, was "Managing Information and Technology." This was an opportunity to realize a long-standing plan for a program on "Language and Cultural Barriers to Information Transfer." My interest in such matters goes way back. In 1984 I researched and lectured on the literature on language barriers to scientific communication in a different milieu.

I solicited umpteen people for this program and secured the co-sponsorship of SIG/III. Finally a list of speakers was solidified: Irene S. Farkas-Conn, Esther Horne, Inez L. Sperr Brisfjord, Leif Brisfjord, and Tefko Saracevic. Saracevic had to drop out. At the last minute S. Nazim Ali asked to participate, but it was too late to add anyone else. Initially, Farkas-Conn, first encountered at the 1988 mid-year meeting, wished to speak on "Using Interactive Technologies to Overcome Cultural Barriers." Leif Brisfjord's chosen topic was "Planning Information Systems for a Multilingual World." It proved more practical to couple speakers with topics rather than papers, and in the end rather than to have formal presentations it proved advantageous to make the session a panel discussion or roundtable in which everyone could chime in on whatever topic was raised, with expectation of audience participation.

The conference program goofed in some details in listing our session. Somehow SIG/BSS got listed in the program as an additional co-sponsor, although I never contacted this SIG about our session.

In any case, here is the session description:

> This session aims to counteract American complacency (*inter alia* as English-speakers) and address possible problems in the world information system that may not have found their way into public consciousness and discussion. The panel will discuss at least these topics: impact of language barriers on intellectual, technical, economic and social progress; consequences of anglocentric bias in the world information system; new technologies and interconnected worlds—opportunities to overcome traditional communication barriers; planning information systems for a multilingual world. We invite the audience to participate in the discussion and suggest these additional topics for consideration: bibliometric studies relevant to the language problem, foreign-language capabilities and deficiencies of scientists and scholars, translation issues (machine and human), terminology banks, and cultural and ideological biases in information systems.

In writing to the panelists afterward, thanking them for their contributions, I mentioned that at the time, I was not entirely satisfied with the outcome of the program, but in organizing the array of scattered comments into a coherent whole in writing up a report (which see), I became happier with the results.

Our programs do tend to arouse outside interest. A month following the annual meeting I received an enquiry about this session from the Netherlands.

Beyond our own programming, I was so impressed by another session, I wrote up for my own use a whole report on it: session #75: "Models of Information and Models of Communication: New Examination of Common Ground." From a philosophical and sociological standpoint, this was the best program of the conference. I thought it unfortunate that it was relegated to the very end of the conference, after most attendeees had already left town.

Session # 67, "The Electronic Library: Plans, Problems and Prospects," turned out to be very relevant to the World Brain program: as far as public access to information is concerned, public libraries could be considered to be the cells of the World Brain. Libraries will contain not only printed documents, microforms, and CD-ROMs, but terminals for telecommunications networks which will permit online access going far beyond the commercial bibliographic databases. User workstations, access to numeric, bibliographic, and full text data were mentioned. Too bad I missed most of the session; I caught only the summary at the end. Needed changes were mentioned, concerning: (1) searching (which is unsatisfactory), (2) literacy (a social problem; users must also know how to use information services), (3) interfaces, (4) technical infrastructure, (5) librarians (a paradigm change in conception of their own work [workstations, networks, computers, software]). Someone brought up the problem of standards, e.g. formats and terminology. It was projected that online electronic libraries will be a reality in major universities in a few years, and in smaller institutions by 1995.

Such is how the future looked in 1989.

I also attended plenary session IV (#71) for just a few minutes. Elizabeth Young of COMSAT, who has a humanities background, mentioned the problem of international cooperation on research in information issues.

This annual meeting marked the end of my participation in ASIS, though my informal interaction with SIG/AH continued for another year. I will address my reasons below. Something was off this time around. I felt as if I overstayed my welcome, and it was time to go.

1989-1990

First, let me tie up some loose ends.

While I cannot find any copies, I know from my correspondence that I received SIG/AH newsletters published September 1988, March 1989, and August 1989 (consisting of a one-page SIG/AH newsletter and a sizable World Brain newsletter).

At the 1989 annual meeting, Matthew Gilmore of Washington, DC became Newsletter Editor.

For some years I had urged the revision of the SIG/AH mission statement. This was the mission statement that I inherited:

> SIG/AH explores the applications of information technology to: a) humanistic scholarship, such as language, history, philosophy, and archaeology; and b) in the creative process, including literature, music, the visual and fine arts, and dance. It aims to place critical theory within the framework of information science and to improve information flow in the arts and humanities.

Illustrative activities include making concordances, collating texts, discovering verbal correspondences between passages, characterizing styles, machine-editing bibliographies, choreographing dance, and computer art.

In addition to some minor emendations, I wanted to strike the reference to "critical theory." I don't know if this was an expression of '60s radicalism (SIG/AH was founded in 1968), an unlikely orientation to take root in ASIS, as "critical theory" as I know it refers to the Frankfurt School, formally known as the Institute for Social Research. The average educated person would probably have heard of Erich Fromm or Herbert Marcuse, but other members of this school were not as widely known or translated in the 1960s. I was not so well versed in critical theory in the 1980s; I was to study it intensely in the '90s. While I would be the last to object to the interjection of critical theory into information science, I deemed the statement in the SIG/AH description to be too partisan, so I struck it out. I finally submitted my revised description in 1988. At some point it was accepted and is now the official SIG/AH description:

SIG/AH explores the applications of information science and technology to humanistic scholarship and artistic creation. Illustrative concerns are librarianship, databases, information retrieval, textual analysis, computerized bibliographies and textual aids, new methods for the organization of scholarly work, bibliometric and other studies of information dissemination, and social structures of humanities disciplines. SIG/AH also has an abiding interest in the humanistic implications of information technology and the information society.

I hoped to organize a conference program around an idea I first proposed to SIG/CR in 1986: a session on "Subject Access to Fiction, Poetry, and Drama." Some libraries had constructed experimental computerized databases that provided in-depth thematic indexing of fiction, transcending traditional subject access to fiction. (This follows in line with my overall interest in content analysis in the humanities, which I pursued in various ways over the years.) I was thinking of doing this in 1989 in addition to the program I organized, but this was not to happen, then or ever.

All in all, I think my colleagues and I accomplished quite a bit. We did our best to earn a SIG-of-the-Year Award, but that did not happen.

In letters to my fellow SIG/AH officers in 1988 and 1989, I lodged a number of complaints and made it clear at first that I would no longer serve in an official capacity and then that I would not re-join ASIS. In fact, I ceased to be a member following the 1989 annual meeting. Curiously, though, in addition to follow-up reports concerning the annual meeting, I continued to correspond with some of my SIG/AH colleagues for a whole year with lists of projects I planned to undertake. I declared my intention to continue to write for the *SIG/AH Newsletter*, compile a list of further organizations and newsletters with which to establish an exchange program, compile a list of my non-ASIS contacts for the purpose of re-establishing contact, and work on the creation of other publications. I sent the new Chairman Ellen Sleeter Karen Meizner's old membership questionnaire and volunteered to attempt re-recruiting former SIG/AH members. As far as I recall none of my intentions came to fruition.

I mostly kept up correspondence with June Andel, discussing her World Brain project, my continuing outreach efforts viz. SCCAC and other outfits, the upcoming ASIS annual meeting in Toronto, and my personal and professional situation at that moment. By 1990 I had a modem and was using it for online interaction via local electronic bulletin boards (BBS), which I believe was the most common form of online interaction until the Internet took over soon after. The last letter I can find was written to June on October 16, 1990. And so ended that era for me and ASIS.

1990 -

And now for the reasons why. First of all, there was the question of cost. It became increasingly expensive to participate, given the costs of attending conferences. In 1989, unlike earlier years, I had as a resident of Washington the advantage of avoiding travel and lodging costs. Yet the conference fee itself was double what I expected it to be, ridiculously high for someone without an organization or one's own business to help foot the costs. Perks such as reducing or waiving this fee (speakers got a waiver for the day of their panel) for all that volunteer work would have been helpful. This high cost was a reminder of something else.

ASIS in effect served both practical and theoretical and practical interests, but more to the point, commercial and scholarly interests. While these are not necessarily at odds or may even be complementary, the difference between an entrepreneurial and a sociological orientation may become visible when on the big issues the former may encourage hype and boosterism while the latter may engender skepticism and critique. ASIS seemed to be more hospitable to the former orientation.

The split between my career and intellectual interests also factored in. It is evident, that while some of the work I did in SIG/AH may have had practical applications, a large proportion of it was done out of purely intellectual interest. Normally, it would be the province of academics. But I was not in academia, and none of my projects were related in any way to my day job. Practically speaking, I was not part of any institutionally collegial cohort; I was essentially acting as a lone wolf intellectual. While this was fun for some time, and I put together interesting and I think worthwhile programs, my situation began to feel absurd.

For me the '90s was to usher in a whole new chapter. For 13 years I was to have a unique occupation that would unite my professional with my intellectual interests, taking most of my attention away from my former preoccupations in the information science world. With Internet communication now the norm, I would join ASIS listservs to keep in touch minimally with what was going on. From time to time I would receive inquiries from currently active leaders of SIG/AH and respond accordingly. However, I am ending this memoir with the year 1990.

The 1980s began with the microcomputer revolution. At decade's end, those who were not using Apple products would still be using DOS. The 1990s would see Windows, more powerful computer and storage media, Internet email, the World Wide Web . . . and the rest is history. Information techniques that were once the province of experiments and pilot projects were now commercial, as search engines for example came to the forefront. Now information science in a direct capacity would enter the daily life of millions. How different the world of today has become. Remember that in 1984 my hypertext bibliography consisted of only eight items!

When living it one does not always reflect on the passage of time. But in retrospect, and for you younger people, the decade of the 1980s is a bygone era. So here is my account of SIG/AH as a slice of ancient history for your review.