

October 1988

OUTGOING MESSAGE FROM RALPH DUMAIN, SIG/AH CHAIRMAN

Since I cannot be here in person to say goodbye as chairman and regular officer of SIG/AH, this message will serve to summarize my experience of the past five years, to make acknowledgements to others, and to define my working philosophy of SIG/AH as a possible guide to the future. I am glad that I can leave SIG/AH in the capable hands of its officers and can finally escape responsibility for our SIG with peace of mind about its future.

I have served in some official capacity for five years, since the annual meeting of October 1983, as Chair-Elect, Program Chair, Chairman, Newsletter Editor, or a combination of these titles. Having shown concern about the seeming inert status of SIG/AH sometime in 1982 or 1983 (actually, I remember a program for the 1983 annual meeting), I was blackmailed into accepting the position of Chair-Elect *cum* Program Chair. I ended up becoming the newsletter editor shortly thereafter in 1984.

I must say that I got off to a superb start in 1984 and produced newsletters of exceptional quality and useful information. Sad to say, I started to fizzle out in 1985. I did not stop "working" on the newsletter; my problem was I "could not" stop working on the newsletter and publish it. Thanks to my unrealistic perfectionism I couldn't bring myself to publish anything short of a magnum opus. I still have material left over that has not been used. Naturally, in the absence of a newsletter some people began to worry that SIG/AH had become inactive or moribund. Nothing could be further from the truth, and our continuous record of thought-provoking conference programs proves that. (Fortunately, Elizabeth Davis and June Andel bailed me out and began to produce our newsletters.)

Let's start with the programs I organized personally.

"Bibliometrics in the Humanities and Social Sciences" for the 1984 annual meeting: There had of course existed previously scattered articles applying bibliometrics to humanities disciplines, but this to my knowledge was the first conscious attempt to bring people together to encourage bibliometric research in the humanities.

"Content Analysis' in the Humanities", 1985 annual meeting: The research program named 'content analysis' started in studies of mass communications and most of its practitioners are still not associated with ASIS or with our information science invisible college, or should I say invisible university. Logically speaking, though, 'content analysis' is part of information science, so I decided to pursue it and of course slant it to humanities disciplines.

"Personal Databases, the Online Organization of Text, and the Future of Scholarly Work", also for the 1985 annual meeting: This program was inspired in part by the hypertext concept, which had been in development on university mainframes for years. I planned this program in 1984, before hypertext became a household word for microcomputer users.

For the ASIS golden anniversary annual meeting in 1987, I succeeded in realizing an idea I had had in mind from the beginning, and created three conference sessions on philosophy and information science, applying information science to philosophy as a discipline (ie. scholarly communication among philosophers, information retrieval from philosophy databases, automated content analysis of philosophical texts) and applying philosophy to an understanding of areas of information science. Regarding the former, a few articles on searching "Philosophers' Index" and classification and indexing of philosophy had appeared, but no one in the English-speaking world had shown consistent interest in this area. (I found some interesting material in German.) Diana Woodward's excellent session on philosophical perspectives on information science filled a real need in ASIS, because ASIS people are constantly making tacit philosophical assumptions in their work, assumptions which often should not be allowed to be taken as given and incontestable.

Other SIG/AH members have organized programs equally as valuable. Karen Markey put together "Microcomputer Applications in the Humanities" for the 1984 midyear meeting, in which I also served as a last-minute substitute speaker. Robert Barnes organized a futuristic and controversial plenary session and panel discussion on Myron Krueger's 'Artificial Reality' for the 1984 annual meeting. I supplied the controversial part as a panelist in which I had the never-to-be-repeated opportunity to give several hundred people a piece of my mind about what I passionately felt to be absurd and morally questionable futuristic fantasies.

June Andel began her SIG/AH activism with "Music as a Manipulative Medium" for the 1986 annual meeting. SIG/AH also contributed a program for the same conference on videodisc technology. June put together a blockbuster program for the 1987 50th anniversary meeting on the 'World Brain' idea, which she followed up with a similarly impressive program for this year's midyear meeting. For the midyear also David Bearman supplied us with "Inventing and Applying the Language of the Arts" on the construction of thesauri and semantic networks in art information. By now you should already know about our program for this conference.

From the foregoing examples, my philosophy for our programming should be fairly obvious: not only to think imaginatively to create exciting and forward-looking programs, but to consolidate and stimulate research in areas that have not been coherently pursued. Just as importantly, my strategy has been to break down artificial disciplinary, organizational, and invisible college boundaries and to bring outsiders into our conference programs and hopefully into ASIS itself. Granted, my specific idiosyncratic interests may have puzzled some, but I think the general principle remains valid. June's continual pursuit of the 'World Brain' concept will help us aim at doing what has not been done before.

We should also maintain liaisons with as many related organizations as possible. I know that June Andel, Elizabeth Davis, David Bearman, T.R. Girill, myself, now Terry Erdt, and I am sure other SIG/AH members are not only members of related groups but maintain ties between SIG/AH and other groups. Newsletter exchanges are superb means of gathering useful information and engaging in publicity and outreach efforts, not to mention promoting possible joint efforts. I have engaged in various newsletter exchanges, and I urge that we do so in the future.

Now for the cumulative acknowledgements to those I may have thanked or may have forgotten to thank over the years. Only a few of you will actually be present, but I will run through the list of people I can recall without unearthing deeply buried documents. When this message appears in print I may have succeeded in adding to this list. If you are present and you made a contribution that my failing memory does not produce here, please accept my apology.

To past officers Karen Meizner, Karen Markey, and Renée Gelinas. To Margaret Jennings who took the rap as Cabinet Representative for countless years. To Elizabeth Davis and June Andel, who came through in my frantic search for other officers to carry on. To Diana Woodward and Ellen Sleeter who became particularly active in SIG/AH planning in 1987 and in this year. To David Bearman who has done a wonderful job to date. To Terry Erdt, who is now joining our leadership. Besides Diana, other exceptionally supportive non-officers should be acknowledged. Again, Bob Barnes for his enormous contribution in 1984. T.R. Girill has helped us out several times since 1984 when he first urged me to pursue my ideas on the online organization of text and later served as speaker several times. Barbara Flood has supported and encouraged me in all my efforts since 1984.

My sole future role in SIG/AH will be as an erstwhile program development officer, doing what I do best and the only thing I can stomach doing, pursuing the strictly intellectual aspects of organizational work. I will try to make the program idea about linguistic and intercultural barriers to information transfer fly, and I may work on other conference program ideas in the future. I will contribute material for the newsletter. But by and large I will treat into the woodwork even if I remain an ASIS member in the coming years. Thanks to all of you for your participation in our arts and humanities oasis.