
BOOK REVIEWS

Mark Y. Herring. *Fools Gold: Why the Internet Is No Substitute for a Library*. McFarland & Co., 2007. Reviewed by Ray Lyons.

Mark Herring reminds us that all that glitters is not gold, and all that Internet search-engines conjure up is not information—and hardly ever is it actual *knowledge*. Herring's book expands upon his earlier articles about why the Internet is not a replacement for libraries: Search-engines can be arbitrary and capricious, electronic sources can be incomplete (footnotes and charts may be missing), digitization projects are beset by copyright problems, electronic materials are too difficult to read on-screen, and so on.

Herring's message goes further by exploring the negative ramifications of all-electronic access for libraries and American society. Like characters from the 1960s *Jetsons'* cartoon, the American public longs for push-button solutions to all of its problems. Herring wonders what is being lost in exchange for speed, convenience, and the attention-deficient desire for quick closure to every problem. His answers: accuracy, relevancy, thoroughness, reliability, authenticity, context, meaning, richness, perspective, analytical thinking—most of the attributes that make information and communication valuable.

There is one important dimension that Herring misses, however. Individuals have not always longed for push-buttons. This longing, most recently manifested as a nearly insatiable attraction to new gadgets, is the fruit of the persistent labors of our corporations. More than a century ago, business corporations recognized the absolute necessity of altering the daily behaviors of the public to increase

consumption of their products—electricity, automobiles, telephones, breakfast cereals, store-made clothing, and so forth. Mid-twentieth-century American know-how and the “democratic capitalism” that Herring praises in his book produced the ultimate behavior-modification technology—*television*. From then on, electronics, advertising, and consumption have gone hand-in-hand. Among the Internet ills Herring identifies—computer viruses, spam, disinformation, deception, fraud, pedophilia, pornography and others—any trace of the prime economic mover, corporate advertising in pursuit of business objectives, is curiously absent from his account.

Herring fears that libraries’ love affair with technology may irreversibly alter their ability to meet society’s educational and cultural needs, primarily by undermining the importance of reading and redefining the meaning of literacy itself.

One intriguing reference—because Herring’s use of it tells so much about his perspective—is the author’s recounting of the myth of Atalanta and the Golden Apple. Forbidden to marry, Atalanta, the fastest human on earth, agrees to marry any suitor who defeats her in a footrace. Love-struck Hippomenes foils Atalanta’s plan with three golden apples received from the goddess Cythera. Atalanta is thrice distracted by the allure of each golden apple Hippomenes tosses into her pathway, and loses the race. Herring likens Atalanta’s loss of an invaluable possession (freedom) to society’s potential loss of a valuable legacy (libraries) due to the glamour of Internet tricks and trinkets such as Google, YouTube, MySpace, and others.

A more compelling interpretation might be that Atalanta sacrifices her own status as champion athlete by falling for the ploy. Similarly, libraries compromise their traditional calling to foster *reading of books* by impulsively embracing all-electronic, all-the-time access—at all costs. Herring wisely advises that we examine these costs for the sake of the future of libraries as American institutions.

Joseph R. Matthews. *The Evaluation and Measurement of Library Services*. Libraries Unlimited, 2007. Reviewed by Glen Holt.

Copyright of Public Library Quarterly is the property of Haworth Press and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.