

## NEWSLETTER

NUMBER ONE

FREE TO MEMBERS

JUNE 1973

The first annual meeting of our Society was held on Wednesday, 11th April, at the home of Mrs. Jennifer Challis, 111 Riversdale Road, Hawthorn. We had a representative of the Australian Government Printing Service, Canberra, as our guest.

After adoption of the minutes of previous meeting and election of Office Bearers for ensuing year (details will be forwarded to members later) a paper on the Storage and Retrieval of Non-Verbal Information, presented by Sydney member Gavin W. Stewart, was read, and a lively discussion followed. Summary of the paper is enclosed.

The meeting also had before it the following information. Of fifty publishers, invited to use the services of our members, many have replied intimating their willingness to do so.

Work has already been obtained for a number of members. It is anticipated that opportunities for indexing work will enlarge as the publishing season accelerates.

We soon will have details of the long-awaited book indexers correspondence course! A notice in the last issue of The Indexer reads as follows:

The Council have arranged with a well-known correspondence college to organize a course in book indexing; the text which has been written by a member of the Society is almost complete. Full particulars of the Course will appear in the April, 1973 issue of The Indexer.

Copies of the April, 1973 of The Indexer should be arriving in Australia in the next few weeks - some members have already received their copies.

Those who wish to learn something of the American way may send for issue 2, vol. 8 (1972) of Drexel Library Quarterly which is devoted to recent advances in indexing (American style).

It contains the following sections and contributions:

- (1) Vocabulary control methods;
- (2) Machine methods of indexing;
- (3) Specialized applications;
- (4) Reviews of professional literature.

It is available for \$US 3 for a single copy (annual subscription: \$US10) from Graduate School of Library Science, Drexel University, Philadelphia, Pa. 19104.

### NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of our Society will take place on Friday, 15 June, at 8 p.m., at the home of Mrs. Dorothy Prescott, 44 Lucas Street, East Brighton. Mrs. Prescott will speak on her experiences in indexing. It is also hoped to have present Mr. Gavin Stewart from Sydney.

Please note time and date. It is hoped that as many members as possible will be present at this meeting. If you will be unable to attend, please notify Mr. Russell on or before 5th June.

Those who have not paid their subscriptions are reminded that they are now due.

(Summarized)

Since I will not be delivering this paper in person I should state at the outset that it is intended merely to raise an issue, rather than attempt to settle one, and I would be very please if this paper stimulates discussion.

An information storage and retrieval system which uses Shakespeare's plays as a Thesaurus leads to some amusing "false drops", but there is more than amusement to be gained from this passage, for the Savage's defination of a philosopher applies rather well to the indexer. There are more things in the source material than are dreamt of in our indexes, and one wonders whether these ghosts may not be as important to the story as the ghost of Hamlet's father, especially when they are the ghosts of non-verbal material forced to haunt a verbal retrieval system.

Examples all tend to one conclusion; that any "system" for dealing with reality usually adopts the approach of the giant Procrustes, who, it will be recalled, had a bed which fitted all comers, after some minor adjustments (to the guest).

I have chosen to use a very general definition of information in this paper, namely "all stimuli which are capable of being perceived by the human being". Thus it includes information received by the five senses (leaving ESP aside for now), however complex, such as paintings, fingerprints, concertos, perfumes, wines, fabrics, faces and so forth. All of these things can be described in words, with varying adequacy, but none are originally coded in that fashion, for after all, nothing is so coded.

There are things such as literature, or speech which are for all practical purposes verbally coded, and there are others for which the assignment of a verbal description is a less automatic task. For examples one need only read art criticism, or wine guides.

Further, I would make the assertion that when one re-codes non-verbal information (in the above sense) into verbal information, there is a significant loss of information, as anyone who has eaten in a restaurant knows only too well. It is surely worth considering the possibility of omitting the verbal translation step (with its attendant "ghost factory"), and attempting to organise non-verbal information on the basis of non-verbal descriptors.

Here I am making the assumption that any whole can be analysed into its parts with minimal loss of information - this being a simplifying assumption which is almost certainly not true of any complex stimulus, such as "The Swan of Tuonela", Mona Lisa , Lobster Mornay, or Botany industrial complex with the wind from the west, but the problem here is the same as that which applies in the verbal analysis field, and similar methods could be used to overcome it, so I will let the assumption stand for now.

The stage is now set for the discussion of how such a system might be arranged, with existing technology, for the storage and retrieval of information relating to perfumes, using an olfactory code.

It is fairly obvious how one could devise a system based on this method of making olfactory stimuli readily accessible. I believe that the number of basic scents which go to compose a perfume is fairly small, and the psychological problem of testing to see how many basic scents are needed to adequately describe any given range of perfumes would be relatively straightforward. (The results of this would not necessarily correspond with the number of chemically distinct scents, or the number of commercially distinct scents, eg

classified on the basis of source, rose being distinct from violet, even though both might involve some of the same chemical compound). One way or another, a decision could be made on what constitutes the "basic" scents, and these would be arbitrarily arranged in "olfactory order" (after all, alphabetic order is no less arbitrary for being familiar). Cards tagged with the individual perfumes would then be produced, containing verbal information in addition, eg name of perfume, supplier etc. These cards could then be filed, in sections which would be labelled by cards tagged with the general scent class, and relevant subdivisions thereof. After that, it would be just a matter of following one's nose.

Rather than go into details of hypothesised systems, I will turn to the question of terminology in these non-verbal indexes. We would have, of course, olfatories, gustatories, auditories, tactories and visualaries(?) in addition to libraries, and the corresponding specialist olfactarians, gustatarians. etc, whose titles would probably become (colloquially) sniffers, tasters etc. There would be disputes over the merits of "taste also" and "taste" crossreferences, and the proponents of the "Escoffier Decimal system" would exchange heated words with those of the "Cafeteria of Congress system".

The Society of Indexers, having no doubt merged with various Wine & Food Societies, would be conducting campaigns against restaurateurs who produced un-indexed menus, and there would be a booming demand for Alka-Seltzer, owing to such things as the misfiling of "pavlova" in the "garlic dishes" taste category. Other questions of interest would be "Is the composer the best indexer of his own symphony", and the computer people would no doubt be trying to get into the act with KTIC (Key Taste in Condiments) indexes.

Having followed the well-tried stomach-to-heart route, I trust that these words have reached their goal, which is primarily to create, or to stimulate, a flexible approach to indexing (and not just the flexibility to elastic-sided pigeon-holes), for there exist many forms of information for which verbal coding is not adequate.