

Does The Reading List
Make the Person?

January 19, 1976

Number 3

The maxim that 'the clothes make the man (or woman)' is less true today than it was before the invasion of the blue-denim army, but most people will agree that a person's clothes, house, family, friends, and possessions all contribute to what we understand of his or her unique personality.

Just as much as any of these attributes, a person's reading list--or, in the case of those too busy to read everything they'd like, the person's *scanning* list--helps to define the individual.

In my own case, one glance at my scanning list yields considerable information about me but I wonder how much one can conclude about my *personality* from that alone.

I often wonder what percentage of *Current Contents*[®] (CC[®]) readers' time is spent reading or scanning. I suspect that many readers are like me in this respect: there is almost no subject I will not scan. I am continually fascinated by new words and ideas.

My addiction to the news media becomes annoying when I go on a prolonged trip. Deprived of my daily dose, I suffer withdrawal. So like many Americans cut off from their familiar newspapers, magazines, and TV, I carefully read the *International Herald Tribune*.

When I returned from a recent trip, I found 27 index-summary pages from the *New York Times* awaiting me. I dutifully scanned all the items under the *Health*

and *Science* heading, but I was forced to skip much material that I normally scan each day. Also piled on my desk were four issues of *Nature*, and an equal number of issues of *Science*, *New Scientist*, *Science News*, *Chemical & Engineering News*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Medical World News*. Waiting at home were *Time*, *Newsweek*, *New Yorker*, and the *National Observer*.

If these don't satisfy my craving, I can turn to *Natural History*, *Audubon*, *Atlantic*, *Saturday Review*, *Saturday Evening Post*, *Washington Monthly*, *National Review*, *Harper's*, *MORE*, and *Columbia Journalism Review*.

Professional publications, especially those relating to information science, demand more and more time. I simply cannot ignore the *Journal of* and the *Bulletin of the American Society for Information Science*, the *Information Industry Association Newsletter*, *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association*, *Information News and Sources*, *STM Newsletter*, *Information Scientist*, *Journal of Documentation*, and *Journal of Chemical Information and Computer Sciences*. It seems that what long ago happened to the biochemist and physicist (and other scientists in increasingly specialized fields) is now happening to the information scientist.

Then there are the local publications: *Philadelphia Magazine*, *Pennsylvania Gazette*, *Delaware Valley Business*, and *Destination: Philadelphia*.

My loyal ISI® colleagues deluge me with fascinating clippings from the avant-garde press: *New Times*, *Rolling Stone*, *Downbeat*, the *Village Voice*, *New York Magazine*, in addition to items from the *Washington Post*, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *London Times* and *Financial Times*.

I referee about one paper per week for outside journals, and an equal number of publications produced by ISI staff members. Some of these are full-scale research articles, while others are letters-to-the editor.

In addition to the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, I regularly go through *Science & Government Report* to see what the government bureaucrats are up to. I sometimes think we should buy the leaders of these agencies subscriptions to *Esquire*, *Fortune*, and *Playboy* to keep them out of trouble. Perhaps *Mad* magazine or *National Lampoon* would be more appropriate.

The only way I can maintain my sanity--and my schedule--amidst this cornucopia of reading material is by turning to *Current Contents*, *ASCA*® (ISI's *Automatic Subject Citation Alert* system), and our *ASCATOPICS*®.

I scan all six editions of *Current Contents* for a number of reasons: to alert myself and others in the company to articles pertinent to the performance of our jobs, to select interesting items for the *ISI Press Digest*, and to keep up with trends and developments in all scientific fields.

ASCATOPICS automatically alerts me each week to every article published (in over 5000 journals) that contain such title-words as *science*, *language*, *thesaurus*, *information*, *citation*, *indexes*, *retrieval*, *remote terminal*, *microfilm*, *network*, *abstract*, *copyright*, etc.

While *ASCATOPICS* will alert me to most everything published in my field, I use *ASCA* to keep tabs on publications and citations to myself, ISI, and my col-

leagues. My *ASCA* profile includes the terms *INST SCI INFORM*, *GARFIELD E*, *CARTTER AM*, *COLE JR*, *KUHN TS*, *LYNCH MF*, *MERTON RK*, *PRICE DJD*, and *SMALL HG*. It also includes the terms *REFEREE*, *RESEARCH*, *EVALUATION*, and *EDUCATION*.

Some 'media gurus,' notably Marshall McLuhan, have forecast the decline of the "Gutenberg galaxy." They predict that as the electronic media proliferate, the common person will tend to give up most forms of written communication. I can see their point: in spite of all the time I spend reading and scanning--or perhaps because of it--I rarely find time for novels. For relaxation and entertainment, I prefer films or TV or recorded music. But it is precisely because I accept the notion that the "medium is the message" that I feel that thinking persons will continue to read printed matter well into the "Edison galaxy"--or whatever future philosophers of communication media will call our post-Gutenberg world.

It is amusing that people talk about the demise of the printed word while most of us cannot devote enough time to reading all the excellent material being printed in both technical and general publications. This is one reason why our *ISI Press Digest* has become so popular: it is tailored to fit the needs of a telecommunications audience already overburdened with printed material.

Some *CC* readers claim that I have given up all 'serious' reading material to scan pornography. If not so, they ask, why have there been so many items on sex in the *ISI Press Digest*? I can only reply that some readers would say that *Architectural Digest* is filled with suggestive pictures of monoliths and domes, that *Flying* is thinly disguised propaganda for women's sexual liberation, and that *National Geographic* causes blindness and insanity. Don't believe everything you read.