BEYOND THE BOOK SAN FRANCISCO

Thursday, December 2, 2004

KENNEALLY: Welcome to Beyond the Book here in San Francisco. My name is Chris Kenneally. I'm director of author relations for the not-for-profit Copyright Clearance Center, and I want to welcome you here to the San Francisco Maritime National Historic Park Visitors Center.

What's important to know about this particular site is that it was once a cannery for fruits and vegetables. Well, I want you to know that everything that we are going to talk about today is absolutely fresh and not at all canned. (laughter) I hope you can enjoy that as we go through the next two hours.

Individual writers here represent a whole variety of groups for the National Writers Union and the North American Travel Journalists Association, The Author's Guild and The National Society of Newspaper Columnists. And we are very delighted to welcome Book TV who will airing this program across the country.

I took note, looking into the history of the area that, Silicon Valley was named first in 1971, but I realized it's interesting to think that just slightly before that, in the summer of 1967, San Francisco became better known for Haight-Ashbury. And I like the idea of high technology, and what could be called a kind of high culture of a different sort, coming together here in a very creative union. And that's one of the things that I want to talk about today. The union and the sometimes disunion of technology with creativity.

I'm holding here a word processor, at least that's what it was to most people a very short time ago. Today, of course, a hand-held is something else entirely.

Now I want to share with you something that surprised me. I have a friend who recently attended an art colony back East, and she's working on a novel, which is the sort of thing that you expect people to work on at artists colonies. And I said what were other people working on, and it turns out they were working on film, they were working on various kinds of artwork.

And, of course, they were all working on the very same piece of technology, on their personal computer. And I thought that that was really a striking way to think about how new work is created today. We all think of our work as writing or film-making, or whatever, and yet we're united in that particular instrument, that particular tool, the personal computer.

So right now it's time to look into this with our various panelists. I want to start by welcoming Ken Goffman who is also known as R.U. Sirius. From quite some time now he's been a cultural commentator and is perhaps best known as the co-founder

of *Mondo 2000*, the iconoclastic magazine that defined the digital culture in the early '90s.

He's the author or editor of seven books including most recently, *Counterculture Through The Ages* which was just published by Random House, and that looks at the concept of counterculture throughout human history. He's been a columnist for *Art Forum*, and for *The San Francisco Examiner*, and he lives right here in the area in Mill Valley. Ken welcome to the Beyond The Book. (applause)

GOFFMAN: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: I would like to start by asking you to explain something – you make a point of saying that the root of technology, the root word of technology is technique. And you point out that for any kind of creative act it always requires technology. Can you tell us what you mean?

GOFFMAN: Well, I mean, I think even if you go back to so called primitive cultures where you look at healing methods like shamanism and so forth there's technique involved. And in all forms of creativity, unless you're just sort of doing field hollers (sp?) or whatever, there is technique, and in fact even in field hollers, it develops an aesthetic so that one knows how to do field hollers. So even spoken word involves technique.

And so I use that when people say technology is a terrible thing to raise the point, that when we talk about technology, we're talking about almost anything that human beings can do beyond simply gathering fruits and nuts, and sitting around in the dirt, you know, waiting to die or whatever.

I mean even hunter-gatherers hunters have technology. Hunters developed technology, and there are people who suggest that we should be headed back toward the hunter-gatherer era, and even they are involved with technology.

So I just – just trying to cross that first boundary so that we can talk about technology before I start saying, yeah, isn't it great. That nano-technology. We can make anything we want out of dirt and sunlight. Or you bridge the gap between one very simple vision and these really radical possibilities that we're facing now that are both scary and promising.

KENNEALLY: Well, is that what it is? I was going to ask what it is that leads people pose technology and creativity as antithetical. Is it because there's something in technology that frightens us today?

GOFFMAN: Yeah, well, I think that an awful lot of people don't. I think that there was more of that prejudice in the '80s, and that there was, to a great extent, there was a great flowering in the early 1990s where people wanted to embrace being in the contemporary world.

There was a long period within counterculture of rejecting being in the contemporary world. And while there's something to be said for that it was also kind of depressing.

And there were at the same that some people were rejecting this hyper-contemporary world, people who were rooted in counterculture, who were sort of the science fiction freaks of the 1960s, and who were hobbyists and engineers, who were also influenced by antiauthoritarian counterculture attitudes, were making this technology.

They were making the computers, they were making the programs, there were developing certain philosophies that had roots in counterculture that anything that's easily copied should be shared. That information should be made available, and if it's not made available you should find your way to the information even if somebody is trying to stop you from doing that.

So there are all these interesting ideas that were being put out by pro-tech people, and people weren't talking to each other. And I feel that one of the things that we did in *Mondo 2000* in the late '80s and early '90s is bridge that gap and give the culture a little juice.

And then in the late '90s it became the dot-com thing, which became very absurd and was alienating. So then you have a little bit of drawing back and people saying, ah, yeah, well, you know, that doesn't look so good to me. And you have a lot of creative people having a critique of that, and maybe wanting to draw away from that. But you also have a lot of people who are in there, they have the tools, they know how to use the tools and they're just using them.

KENNEALLY: Right. Well – and this role that the counterculture plays in advancing technology and bringing it together with creativity is something you point out in the book has a long history. In fact, it goes back to the myth of Prometheus.

GOFFMAN: Yeah – I – definitely – I mean, of course, that's not history, it's myth. And actually, I mean, to the Greeks, Prometheus was something of a demon. It was a – the Greeks considered it a warning. They thought that humans being able to do too much with technology and science was hubris, as do – in some ways of the Christian religion believe that as well.

So Prometheus was meant as a critique, but he was embraced by the Romantics in the 19th Century as a positive figure, and he has inspired people since then, or that myth has inspired people.

But as you go through history, as you go through the history that we cover in the book, you see particularly starting with The Enlightenment, the Age of Reason, where the existence of media, in this case, the printing press and the ability to

distribute literature, and the fact that common people became literate, because ideas, subversive ideas were being spoken, but they were being spoken in Latin for almost a century.

And then, suddenly, because of technological advances that put literature, and magazines, and all these hands on, easily distributed things into the hands of more people, common people began to speak the language that eventually became the Age of Reason, and The Enlightenment, and democracy and civil liberty-ism and all those things.

KENNEALLY: Just to stick with the figure of Prometheus for a moment, then for you he's hardly a demon at all but he's the first real individual.

GOFFMAN: Yeah, I mean in some ways, he is the individual in mythology. I mean, in some ways also, the book is called from *Abraham to Acid House*, and in the same chapter as Prometheus I cover Abraham, the first Jew.

And he very much individuated by listening to a voice in his head, which he took to be God, and invented monotheism, which in many ways, is an oppressive thing to many of us now. But at that time it was a divergence, and it was an individualistic divergence, and he formed a dropout culture really that moved away from Samaria where he was.

So, yes, Prometheus was the first individual. Socrates in many ways was the first historical individual within Western culture as we understand it.

KENNEALLY: And clearly the role of rebellion in the case of Prometheus, rebellion against the Gods plays an important part. What are the other characteristics of counterculture through the ages that apply to where we are today, do you think?

GOFFMAN: Well I think one of the characteristics that we try to bring out in the book, which doesn't exist in every single counterculture we cover, but probably 15 of 16 or something like that, is changeability. Nietzsche called it transubstantiation, the idea that you can radically change during the course of your life. And the idea that societies can change and philosophies can change.

And then this – the reason this doesn't seem very radical to us now is because people had the courage and the individuation and the ability to gather into groups and push this idea out. Obviously in some societies it's still considered a very radical and extreme thing that human beings can change and society can change.

KENNEALLY: Well, let me ask you about how the technology has, in fact, changed your own work. Clearly you're able to reach an audience, a global audience immediately. You have a Website for the book for instance. How does tat make you different as a writer, or does it?

GOFFMAN: You know, it's hard for me because I really made my reputation writing about this technology. So it's hard for me to separate how writing about the technology gave me an opportunity and a voice in the world from the fact that it also gives me this means of distribution and various conveniences and ways to mix and match creatively, and so forth. It's hard to make that separation.

In many ways of course, this new culture creates difficulties for writers. Everybody writes, or everybody presumes that they write, and people go on the Web and everybody posts, everybody is involved in this global discourse, which is mostly being done as text.

And so there is a kind of presumption that writing is devalued. There's inflation – huge inflation when it comes to writing. And it's very hard as somebody in a society where you're required to make money to stand up and say, well, no, I'm a writer. So it introduces interesting complexities.

KENNEALLY: It's a mirror –

GOFFMAN: And so, I mean, good writing still tends to rise to the top but the rewards are reputation, embraced by community response, controversy, discourse, those things. And the reward of getting a book out, and being able to make a living as a writer is something that I tend to think is receding. I don't mean to give bad news.

KENNEALLY: Well, it's not a surprise entirely.

GOFFMAN: I hope it lasts, you know, another 10 years or so.

KENNEALLY: Right, right, at least for the rest of our careers. But it's interesting, technology throughout history has been an effort by human beings to free themselves from labor.

And I want to tie that together with the notion that came out of the counterculture you suggest that information itself is free. And in your own mind how do help us unravel that, and think about that, because I think the dilemma that writing and publishing faces is to be able to use the technology and still survive in an economic world.

GOFFMAN: Yeah, I mean, it's a huge dilemma that has so much to do with the kind of economic system we have now, and whether that economic system can continue to make sense in situations where there isn't scarcity, because the way capitalism has formed up to this point is based on scarcity, and value comes out of scarcity.

And once you have a situation where, like I say, there's all this massive amount of discourse on the Web, everybody's doing it for free. The music is out there and people are doing that for free, etc.

And if I have my book on the Web and somebody takes that book off of the Web and puts it on their own computer, there's one more copy of my book in the world. Whereas if they go to the store and buy my book, there's one less copy of my book in the world.

So as one of my friends said, and I'll have to say this in a nice way, you're living in a world where the sheep crap grass. (laughter) They're eating it, but they're then – – more. That's a whole different economic and we're not prepared to cope with that in any way under our current system, I don't think.

So the question for me is one of hanging on. I do like to make a living. And then at the same time I like the fact that this technology is collapsing these old systems, and that new possible systems might emerge.

And you see – particularly within a hacker culture which is really spread pretty broadly in terms of its attitude among youth and computer culture, it's fairly widespread, that there is this idea, or this sense of a gift economy, that it's better to give stuff away for free, and it's more fun to do stuff that you do out of enthusiasm than it is to do stuff because you want to launch a career, or because you have to do it, etc.

And this – you begin to see the very loose formations of a whole different way of dealing with creativity, with production, with all of these things.

And I'm not saying that this can easily come to be a dominant form, certainly not until we have production technologies that can create an end to scarcity in the same way that digital technologies do. But you begin to see the form of new ways of dealing with money, with wealth, and so forth.

KENNEALLY: Well, haven't you proposed, or at least you did to me when we first talked, that all writers should be given a permanent vacation.

GOFFMAN: Yeah. Actually –

KENNEALLY: A permanent paid vacation.

GOFFMAN: Yeah, well, I was being selfish. (laughter) But actually there's a very interesting thing going right now in England where the British government has been trying to devolve the welfare state, imitating what we've been doing in the United States and most places around the world.

And a bunch of British rock stars actually, like guys from Blur, and Oasis, and a bunch of British bands that have brought a lot of money into England, have gone to people in the Labour Party who were advocating this change. It's just like in America where the Liberals and the Conservatives are all pushing to devolve the welfare state.

And they said, "We were able do this because we lived in welfare for all those years." The whole rock and roll industry in England was able to thrive because of – "As bratty young men we hung out on welfare, and smoked dope, and made music. And now you're giving our elders – you're making them knights, and some of them were doing the same thing." (laughter) I know great writers in America who even call themselves Libertarians, but who wrote their books – they were getting checks, welfare checks.

So I think in some ways one almost looks back to the days of kings and queens and patronage, right, because the economics of doing certain kinds of art just become very complex and very difficult, and the large corporate meter really conspires to build the celebrity culture where there are those few big heads up in front that get all the attention, that get all the help from the record companies, the book companies, and all of that, and everybody else is expected to sort of recede into the background.

So they're setting up this sort of opposite force. In the meantime there's this huge thing moving right below there where lots of people are able to communicate and able to do that stuff because they do have the Web, they do have the Net, they do have alternative means of distribution.

KENNEALLY: Well, Ken, you've set up the conversation for us I think very well. Thank you very much indeed.

GOFFMAN: Thank you.

KENNEALLY: I want to move now to Glenna Matthews. Welcome, Glenna. She's a Visiting Scholar. (applause) Glenna Matthews is a Visiting Scholar at the Institute of Urban and Regional Development for the University of California, Berkeley, and is teaching a course this fall there on U.S. women's history.

Important to this discussion, and I'll explain why in a moment, she curated an exhibit on the history of San Francisco not long ago for the San Francisco Public Library, and she has served as a consultant for an award-winning documentary about the historian Angie Debo. She is the author of five books, and in particular most recently *Silicon Valley, Women, and the California Dream*. Welcome again, Glenna.

When we talked about your appearance in the program you threw together something that was interesting which was that the high-tech culture of Silicon Valley has its roots all the way back to the Gold Rush here in San Francisco. You made a point that the characteristics of San Francisco at that very early stage are familiar even today.

And I'm thinking about that, that it went from ships carrying all those gold diggers to chips today. So from ships to chips in about 125 years. Can you explain that a bit more?

MATTHEWS: Well, I want to – first of all, I want to make clear that the Gold Rush had many negative aspects because native peoples were done out of their land, and so on, so I don't want to – I'm trying not to appear too much as a booster. And also there was a lot of damage to the landscape when the hydraulic mining started to take place.

But the thing about the Gold Rush was that it brought a mix of people to the Bay Area that had never been seen in human history before. And even though there was racism, it was not possible for any single group to dominate, as often happened in other parts of the country and the world. That is Protestant, Catholic and Jewish institutions were all created almost at the same time, so there was no Protestant domination.

And then even though the Chinese experienced a lot of discrimination, as everyone knows, they started building institutions. In the 1850s, there was Chinese opera as well as Italian opera. And so hat that means is that there's this percolating – I'm going to have to use my hands – percolating up of a lot of human talent, and there's this wonderful cross-fertilization that starts happening. When I curated that exhibit, ethnic restaurants in San Francisco in the 1850s. So a lot of the things that we prize about San Francisco now started appearing, the cultural diversity, wonderful ethnic restaurants and so on.

And what's negative about the Gold Rush, as I say, there's certainly exploitation. But what I think is salutary and hopeful is that when you bring so many people together something wonderful in terms of creativity begins to happen.

That's one component. The other component is that hydraulic mining, which did, in fact, do damage to the landscape, also created a tremendous demand for technical capacity. And so there was a very precocious technical and scientific development here even in the late 19th Century. And you have a lot of innovation in the early 20th Century even before Hewlett and Packard started Hewlett-Packard in the late 1930s.

Lee DeForest in Palo Alto around 1912 and the vacuum tube, Philo Farnsworth in television being developed in San Francisco in the 1930s. So there's a continuous history of technological development, and also this wonderful social context of people mixing in ways that are quite unusual.

KENNEALLY: Absolutely. And it seems that cross-fertilization is a circle really. It continues to –

MATTHEWS: Right.

KENNEALLY: – feed on itself. You mentioned the lack of complete dominance by one group or another. Has that led to any kind of a special cooperative spirit in this community?

MATTHEWS: Well, people have written books about – AnnaLee Saxenian wrote a book comparing Boston and Route 128 with Silicon Valley, and suggesting that there is a special ethos in Silicon Valley that is more cooperative.

I'm not a historian of business per se, so I don't want to say that I authoritatively can say yeah or nay to that. But I am a historian of the social history, social mix, and one thing I found, even in the 19th Century in the East Coast, European Catholics, particularly the Irish, were extreme – they were really the mudsill, and it took them a generation or two to rise.

In San Francisco you have Irish entrepreneurs, you have Jewish entrepreneurs, Italian entrepreneurs. And so that's what the lack of domination means, is that you have long histories of groups forming institutions. And even again with the Asians who faced horrible discrimination there is entrepreneurship very early on, small businesses in Chinatown and so on.

KENNEALLY: But that – on the positive side that cooperative spirit. Was there cooperation at the very beginning or throughout various stages between the technologists if you will and the more creative people?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, I think so. I mean, one perfect example, I attended Stanford, what the heck, I'll plug Leland Stanford. He made his money with stores after the Gold Rush, founded Stanford University, and he also sponsored the photographer Eadweard Muybridge, taking early photographs of whether horses took all their feet off the ground at the same time. And of course, that's one of the things that leads to the birth of the motion picture industry.

So yes, some of the capitalists really were investing in technology pretty early on.

KENNEALLY: Because I think that's an interesting subject, the idea that science and the muses can come together again. It's sort of following on what Ken was saying, that it's not necessarily a disunion.

I want to ask you about a recent experience you had. You were a Fulbright Scholar in Russia, in Moscow.

MATTHEWS: Right.

KENNEALLY: And there discovered what it's like for students at university in Moscow, and kind of the state of research and the state of libraries there. Can you tell us about that?

MATTHEWS: Yeah, I'm very happy to because this was a powerful experience for me. When I first got there, I spent a semester teaching American history to Russian students, most of whom were wonderful. And early on I got asked to serve on a panel that interviewed people for grants to come to the U.S. And it was really heart-wrenching.

One scientist told us that he has a hard time getting published because he doesn't have access to current scientific literature, so all of his research is kind of ipso facto behind the times. And it gave me a new appreciation for Andrew Carnegie, by the way, that we had enlightened – I mean, again, I can say bad things about the robber barons, but it was very enlightened for Andrew Carnegie to put so much of his personal fortune into libraries. And Russia, I'm sure other countries too, could really benefit from that kind of investment. But the country doesn't have the money to invest in libraries now.

So the library – Moscow State University is the oldest university in the country. It has a very distinguished faculty, and the American History library – and students who want to study American History, but that library is really Congressional Records, and the books that Fulbright Scholars – where given $1500 to buy books – and that over the years has 30 years of the program teaching American History, that's what's built up the library.

So I had a number of students who were interested in women's history, and they were coming to me and saying, "Please help us figure out how we can access to sources. The Congressional Record is not much of a source for doing women's history." Occasionally, but not invariably.

So I flashed on the fact that I have two friends, fine scholars, Kathryn Kish Sklar and Tom Dublin, both at SUNY Binghamton, who launched a Website, The Women in American Social Movement's Website. And at first it was done out of their vest pocket, and then they – I don't know whether they sold it, I really don't know the arrangements. But anyhow, it's now being run by something called AlexanderStreetPress.com.

And the thing that's exciting about this Website is that it's got the same editorial standards, so it's really not quite what you're talking about, because it's not just – it's not every person blogging, it's got editorial standards like regular publishing. And people do documents, projects, for this Website that embody wonderful primary sources.

KENNEALLY: And can be – just give us an idea of what that can mean. That can mean material going back how far and what sources?

MATTHEWS: Well, into the late 18th century there are materials on this Website on women's history that go back to Philadelphia in the 1790s. And so women of

color, labor organizing, any number of different cuts in American Women's history, impeccable scholarly standards.

Now it is proprietary now, however, when I explain the circumstances that Moscow State does not have – not only doesn't have much of a budget, it has no budget, there's no way that they could afford to pay for that Website. So they gave me, shall we say, a special deal, and I was able to raise money among my women historian friends, and now Moscow State students have access to primary sources that will make possible their doing research that never would have been possible before.

KENNEALLY: And the idea there is that the sources are available to them in Moscow.

MATTHEWS: Right.

KENNEALLY: I think that's the most remarkable part to me, that it's not required to come to Stanford, for example, to do the research if they have the particular sources. And it really is about creating the data in the right places accessible to people who need it.

MATTHEWS: Also I think this editorial process is important too, because then professors can trust that it's reliable.

Let me just say also that when I first got there, one of the best students wrote a paper on the Black Panther Party, all from sources he'd gotten on the Internet. And I lived in the Bay Area where the Black Panther Party was flourishing, and I thought, "I had to go to Moscow to find out stuff about the Black Panther Party that I didn't know."

So these students are very avid, but it's in and out what they're going to find on the Web, and the quality of what they find on the Web. So it's very exciting that there are certain Websites now being created that have impeccable standards and very reliable.

KENNEALLY: I think that's an interesting point, and one I'll pursue later which is that the Web makes possible all manner of research, but we have to kind of look at it in a very special way, not necessarily askance, but with a kind of measure of doubt and to be sure that we vet the source as well as just find it out there.

I want to ask you one last thing. You're a write who's been at work for 30 years. You're very concerned about the craft itself, and you've really embraced the personal computer as a way to help you with that. I'd like you to tell us about that.

MATTHEWS: I love writing. My father was a journalist. My daughter is a journalist. My grandfather ran an Italian-language newspaper in St. Louis. So you could say writing is in my blood.

And I am a terrible typist until I got a – I got a personal computer in 1983. I cannot tell you how many drafts I laboriously typed of my doctoral dissertation at Stanford. And that, by the way, is what became *Silicon Valley, Women*. And it's amazing to me that I survived that process because it was so traumatic to make a mistake.

Now I find that I only try and write a few pages a day and we all have our various needs. Some people write a lot. But I like to write a few pages and then endlessly edit, so that I know at the end of the day that I have a few good pages. And I find that the computer just makes it possible for me to polish in ways that I find intensely gratifying.

KENNEALLY: And if you ever need to take a break, what do you do?

MATTHEWS: (laughter) I play solitaire. (laughter) I play solitaire, computer solitaire, and then I go back, and my prose looks – I have some distance from my prose. I didn't know that he would – I thought I was making a confession to him that was not going to necessarily be on national television. But there, I've come out of the closet. I play computer solitaire.

KENNEALLY: Well, we all need to keep something minimized down at the bottom of the screen that will allow us to get a break in. Thank you, Glenna.

I'd like to turn now to continue the discussion from the perspective of an editor for an important regional press, Gary Luke. Welcome to Beyond the Book.

Gary is the editorial director of Sasquatch Books based in Seattle. It's a West Coast regional publisher. He's going to tell us just what he means by that in a moment. He's worked with a number of authors from Gus Lee and Bruce Barcott to Shawn Wong and Jana Harris.

Prior to joining Sasquatch Books, he was an editor at Simon and Schuster, Plume/Dutton/Penguin and Dell/Delacorte in New York. Gary grew up in Seattle and graduated from Western Washington University. Gary, welcome. (applause)

You told me that publishing, despite what we've been hearing about the role of technology today in writing itself, still lives to a degree in the shadow of the old world, or what Bill Gates referred to as the business of putting ink on dead trees.

Can you tell us what you mean by that and just how far does that shadow stretch or has it receded some in recent years?

LUKE: Well, when I was an editor in New York, and it wasn't that long ago, all of the computers in the editorial department were – had been handoffs from the accounting department, because they were the first to bring computers to

publishing. And it was really only the younger editors who were even interested in having computers around.

But basically what – publishers produce books, and books really are – it's a very old, and it's proved to be quite a trustworthy format of printing and binding paper. I think that in many ways the index in the back of a book can be faster than the search engine on the screen. It's infinitely portable.

And right now, I was just thinking about this, that the cost of creating books hasn't – at least over the last 10 years – the cost of paper has been pretty flat. I'm not exactly sure what the economic reasons are for that. But there's not a lot of pressure it seems on publishers to change that.

KENNEALLY: We've been hearing at the same time as technology is sort of coming to the fore, all manner of predictions right? They have been both sort of Pollyanna-ish and envisioning a golden age, and they've been dire as well.

Are there some that you're happy having come to pass? People talked at one point about the e-book replacing the printed book, and that's yet to happen. How do you feel about that?

LUKE: Well, I think maybe about five or six years ago the e-book was definitely a – every other phone call it seemed like that came in to our publishing house was someone trying to get us involved in an e-book project.

And so we started to investigate this and we even bought one of those Rocket e-book readers, and it sat out on a table in our office for awhile. And staff members were invited to charge it up and load up some books and take it home. And it rotated for awhile.

And then one – six months later we realized that it was missing. Someone had come into the office, maybe the cleaning lady, I don't know, and had taken it and nobody had really noticed that it was gone.

The e-book never quite happened. I think that there's a ton of potential there, and it would be great if I were traveling to have all of my work, and maybe that's what a laptop computer is in essence. But that kind of technology has certainly not replaced the book.

KENNEALLY: But technology has changed the way you as an editor work with authors in a variety of ways. And I'd like to have you reveal some of that for us here. We have an audience of authors and people who would like to become authors. And I think it's interesting to have a glimpse of what it's like for either a proposal or a manuscript to land on your desk or on your desktop and what happens next.

LUKE: There definitely are more e-mail submissions. I know that many agents don't bother to put anything into the mail anymore. You get an – if you're – well, I don't know how many people are fiction writers here, but fiction is generally submitted on a complete manuscript. And so that traditionally meant Xeroxing for the agent and/or the author making the submission 10 or 15 copies of it at $40 or $50 a pop because, of course, no editor will receive a double-sided manuscript. And sending that out, having the editor read 20 pages of it, and send the entire battered thing back to you, because it had just been wrecked in the transport.

Now many proposals and manuscripts are coming out – are coming across to editors in e-mail. You can read it, you can respond very quickly.

As a small press, we invite submissions from individual authors. They don't have to come through agents. And many authors, just through word of mouth, have found me and I invite them to e-mail a proposal. And so it speeds up the response, I think, and I think that just for the author, the burden of sending out paper submissions is decreased somewhat.

KENNEALLY: Does it bother you, you have to print it out, or do you read these things on the screen only?

LUKE: For a novel I'll print out 50 pages rather than – and if I want more I can – I know that the other 400 are sitting on my hard drive. It should bother me, but it doesn't. It's not that big a deal.

KENNEALLY: But even before you hit the print button, you do some other work.

LUKE: Well, I can do a lot of research to figure out – if an author is sending me something, and I've never heard of the author, I'll do a search and figure out who this person is. Are we talking about an expert here, or a kook, or an eccentric, or someone who is – who has developed one way or another a large following that demonstrates an interest in the topic. That kind of stuff matters, and it's pretty easy to find these days.

KENNEALLY: In a way it's kind of a credit check. If you want to go to the car dealer and get the car, get the loan, they are going to find out something about your history. And that's what you're doing. And we all, like it or not, have a history on the Web right now, especially if we are writing.

LUKE: Right. The other day we got an e-mail submission from an author who claimed to have written a book that sold a million copies. (laughter) Now this sounds like a lot of hooey. But we have access to – basically, it's the Nielsen ratings of book publishing, it's called BookScan, which measures the sales out of bookstores for all of the books that are published. And so we went to the record and found his book, and in fact, he had. (laughter)

KENNEALLY: That raises –

LUKE: And we became very interested in him.

KENNEALLY: Immediately I'm sure. (laughter) And if you want to pursue that for a moment please, BookScan raises something I think you said that it's both wonderful and creepy at the same time, if you can tell us about that. And there's something out there called the comp title that comes in it.

LUKE: Right. Well, when the – everybody has – all published authors at least now have a track record, and that track record is available. Fifteen years ago, before every bookstore had a personal computer, or access to a network, the publisher's rep could go in and say, "This guy – we have a new book by this author and his last book was very successful." And there can be sort of the aura of success attached to an author and a book.

Now the bookstore can look back at its record and see, "Well, in fact, we only sold 30 copies of that book, and that's not very many. And so for the new book we'll buy 20 copies." Or fewer even. And so, the numbers can be – can follow you along and that can be a little bit damaging and kind of hard to get over.

KENNEALLY: But the comp title or the sale history become more important than reviews at some point, don't they?

LUKE: Yeah, the –

KENNEALLY: Or they compete with reviews at least.

LUKE: Well, they're part of the information that unfortunately publishers and bookstores use to position and understand a book.

If you're publishing a history of – a narrative history of Italy, they're going to look at all of the books that somehow relate to that, and see, well, is this a topic that sells books.

And regardless of how well written or how different an approach the book in question brings to that topic, everything is going to be related to the patterns that have been established from all of the other books that have been published in that area.

KENNEALLY: Yeah, it's fascinating how that ability to search in all manner, which seems to be common to so far our discussion, is one that yields good results and sometimes not so good. Let's leave people on an up-note. Search allows you to go out and find authors who may not yet have even thought about writing a book.

LUKE: Right.

KENNEALLY: Tell us about that.

LUKE: We are – as a small press our – many of our books are – the idea starts out somewhere in the house where one of the editors will say, this is an example, there's this new crafting phenomenon going on in the world, where the act of gluing a little piece of felt onto another little piece of felt is considered a feminist act, and where – this is something that's going on in Seattle, and Olympia, and Portland, possibly in Berkeley, I don't know.

That craft used to have a second-class citizen status in the arts I suppose. But that it's now being sort of reclaimed, and it is, I don't know, one of our editors thought there was this trend going on out there, started to do the search, and found a collective in Portland called Super Crafty, and they have this motto of Just Say No to Mass Production. They are a very energetic and creative and funny group of young women. And she went down and convinced them that they could write a book, and they're deep into the process of that.

KENNEALLY: That's wonderful. Thank you, Gary, and we'll continue the conversation with you in just a moment. Now finally I want to introduce Mike Kanellos. Michael is an editor at large at CNET or News.com here in San Francisco. He covers hardware, start-ups, and breakthroughs in research and development of company labs and universities.

As a result of all his journalism he's appeared on National Public Radio, Fox News, CNN, and a host of other programs to discuss and comment on technology. He's a graduate of Cornell University and a lawyer by training from Hastings College. Welcome, Michael.

KANELLOS: Thank you, Chris. (applause)

KENNEALLY: I'd like you to talk about how technology, especially as a technology journalist, but how technology is changing your own work. First it's fascinating to think that CNET, at least in this country, only exits on the Web. It has never had a print version.

KANELLOS: There still is no print version. We have a small print publications out in China and parts of Europe, just because people are still getting used to reading on the Web.

But it's changed a lot because in the – even think seven, eight years ago, it was really a 24-hour weekly news cycle. Things would occur, people would work on it, it'd go on the evening news or a newspaper.

And now it's fairly immediate. Something happens, someone makes a speech, there's a merger, there's a scientific discovery, it's out in a little while. The speed

has actually been compressing even more now, just people would put a few blurbs out.

It's good and bad. One, you get the immediate – you get the news much quicker than you ever did before. At the same time there's slightly more of a chance for errors, especially when you – when people begin to put in predictions, or they try to actually interpret the meaning of an event, and what it can mean for the future.

And often you'll find the analysis of an event will change within three days, and then people will downgrade it from the greatest thing since when man first started chipping arrowheads out of obsidian, to, well, kind of an interesting thing this month. So you got to take it with a grain of salt sometimes.

KENNEALLY: I guess what you're saying is there's less time for reflection, and there's no opportunity. As a journalist myself if you were working on that cycle to contribute to a weekly publication, you got the assignment perhaps on Friday, it was due the following Wednesday, and you had three days to talk to a variety of sources.

You're attending a conference or you're speaking with somebody at a university and what you heard today is potentially published tomorrow.

KANELLOS: Or you pick up your cell phone, and you call somebody, and say – dictate now and then you just dictate it, and it's gone. A lot of it depends now – I think to succeed or to do well in it, you really have to depend on a lot of your own tribal wisdom, or your tribal knowledge. You have to go in there, to an event or a speech, and really know the background if you're going to do that, or you can wait, and things like that. But it does – reflection is definitely going by the wayside, sadly enough.

KENNEALLY: But again this sort of good/bad thing that happens. Your sources now are more than just the usual suspects. Again reflecting on my own career you knew who to go to, the people who would pick up the phone or return the call. Today your sources include your readers.

KANELLOS: Yeah, it can be. In fact, there was a great one this summer. There was a – kind of a minor story. Intel was going to get into the TV market, and they had a bunch of products for this. Then it came out this September that they're not going to do it. It was a terrible product. It was flawed. It wasn't working.

Well, it didn't come out because all of us in the journalistic world were chasing this story. There was actually this one individual. He was shopping for it in Circuit City, and he said, "Oh, the salesman told me that product's been cancelled." And he sent a note to me, someone at Forbes, someone at *The New York Times*.

And I, you know, said, "Oh, thank you, Herb." We called up and they said, "You're right, it's cancelled. Thank you very much."

It was like right on. You know, we appreciated it. It happens a lot where there's so much going on, people just send – tell you about things. And often they're wrong. Often it's not correct. Every week there is Microsoft is moving to Canada to avoid US regulations. Hasn't happened yet. I don't know if it will.

But you do get things from people. Disgruntled employees, casual shoppers, or people who – there's one guy I know who studies the pricing of computer memory in New Zealand, because he claims it's a traditional dumping ground for the Chinese, the Koreans and the Taiwanese. And all of a sudden memory prices go up, that means there's going to be a worldwide shortage. And if they go down, there's going to be a glut. He's been right once every 10 times, but when he's right, you have it there first.

KENNEALLY: And you've had experiences where readers have gone beyond being helpful. They've in fact been vengeful to you. Can you tell us about that? There was the time when somebody actually used the Web and used search to do something that we wouldn't want to have happen to us.

KANELLOS: It was kind of – it was a *MacWorld*, and I wrote a – I'd write columns for it. And I wrote kind of a tongue-in-cheek thing. A lot of people took it the wrong way. And started writing hate mail and things like that.

And one guy went out and actually he wrote this essay saying, "This person's name is Michael Kanellos. He lives at this address. This is his wife's name." And my wife has a different last name than I do. And then he said, "Here's what they paid for their house," and all this other information. "Here are the first five numbers of his social security number."

And at first it was very scary, it's like here's my life, someone could take action against me. But then I also – I was kind of intrigued. Because I looked at the value of the house, and I go, "This guy's just looking at the tax records." (laughter) He's kind of looking – the compare. It's gone way up in value, and I was real angry about it.

I talked to a friend of mine who works in the security industry, and he goes, "Oh, here's where he found the information." And he goes, "I always check on what my boss bought for property and things like that." And he goes, "You should use it too." So now I actually do. (laughter) So – well, you got to find out. You got to – your privacy's gone but you've got to realize that it does take some effort to actually expose you and things like that.

And those people where it was posted, once they found out there were personal information, it was kind of going beyond the pale, they left all the – call me all the

names you want to, they took that information down right away. So I was pretty happy about that. There are some risks but so far nothing really that terrible.

KENNEALLY: When you get an e-mail from a reader who is unhappy, or wants to be argumentative, or whatever, you must have an impulse to say, "Eh, that's just somebody out there who I'm never going to meet and I don't need to answer." But I think you told me you found that answering is really a good thing to do. Why?

KANELLOS: It is. It is, because you find out they're not as – and you'll get really every four letter word you can think of thrown at you. But you just kind of answer their arguments and you say, well, that's one way to interpret it. You can interpret it this way.

They're actually trying to be fairly nice. E-mail is just not a good medium for initial thoughts and then people realize, they see there's someone behind it, there's a human being, they're go, "I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean to ruin your day. You bring up some good points, still disagree."

And some of these people I've spoken to for years now, I mean, off and on. We've never met in public, but they'll write in and say, "Oh, I saw that article," and you go – and often we'll agree, often disagree. It's amazing that your first impulse is to say, "How dare you call me these names," and if you're actually nice to them, it really defuses it a lot. It's a weird phenomenon.

KENNEALLY: Gary was telling us about BookScan, and the ability to find out immediately how many books an author actually did sell. There's something similar that happens with CNET and other online news sites. Your editors can find out how many people actually read your articles.

KANELLOS: Oh, yeah. In fact, you can even now – the tools in there where you can find out as it's live. You can just click and see, OK, there's X number of people logged into this. There's so many people in the last hour.

And it's good and bad. I have qualms about it, because, one, you do get to find out what people are interested in. Often, as an editor you'll downgrade a story saying, "Well, it's just a simple headline." Then you'll find out it's the most important thing. It's the thing people really want to read. But then other times you find yourself just chasing the popularity of your story, and you might ignore bigger, greater things.

Luckily it hasn't got to that point. You're not completely always going for ratings, because you can't really predict what people are going to want. It's all over the map. You'll write something, you'll think, "This is the most important thing I've ever written, and people have to read this," and nobody will read it.

KENNEALLY: But on the other side, has someone's excitement, or I should say, the reader's excitement about a particular subject so surprised you that you pursued it further and found that that led you to an important story?

KANELLOS: Oh, yeah, happens all the time. I can't – there's nothing on the top of my head right now, but you'll uncover weird small obsessions. A few years ago, there was one where people were taking their computers and putting them in what looks like Darth Vader heads or putting them in a – or a little model, or putting it inside like a breadbox or something.

And it ended up being a whole subculture, and we started tapping in. There was a lot of people doing it. They said, "Here's my picture of my – what I've done with mine." It's mostly the 15-to-30 year old age group, but it's actually fairly interesting stuff.

And so one guy did a whole Fritz Lang Metropolis. And he modeled it after some of the buildings in Metropolis. It was actually – it was fairly cool and you had to – but it was amazing. There was a whole group of people doing it, and we were blind to it. We – I just actually the first one or two examples we saw.

KENNEALLY: Great. Well, as a last question before the break and something to sort of leave us thinking, and we can continue the subject, in the next hour, how often does it happen that the work you do winds up in places that it shouldn't be? How often are you either plagiarized or put sort of the way we would – otherwise ripped off? How often does that happen and how do you feel about that?

KANELLOS: It happens a lot. It's primarily right now an overseas phenomenon. There's actually a few sites in Korea and a few sites in Europe that will just take the byline off, translate the article, and stick their own byline on. And legally what can you really do? I mean, finding these people would be difficult enough.

Other times you get as reported in, and then they'll actually use the quotes and almost all the language. Other times they just cite what you did and actually do their own reporting. They give you first credit for it.

It's something that really needs to be cracked down. Fair use is pretty much out of control. People do consider things now – people do consider out – if it's up for free on the Web, they do consider it free. They don't look at the labor and things like that behind it.

And it does hurt. I think they'll be a shakeout on it, but it's going to be tough to come up with a legal answer to it, because often you find it's just – it might be 18 people with a server who almost have no assets, and if you take that from their corporation, they can just re-form another corporation. But I have no idea how it will be stopped.

KENNEALLY: We can discuss that and other things in our next hour. Thank you all. Thank you very much indeed. (applause)

Well, I hope that was good food for thought. We have some other kind of food and refreshments outside. We'll take like a very quick five minute break and come back here right – immediately, then we can have the question and answer part of the program. Thank you very much.

END OF TAPE