

acknowledgments, work on the translation gave te Heesen the opportunity to update several footnotes and references to reflect more recent scholarship, although she does indicate “the English edition remains essentially the same as the German edition.” The University of Chicago Press is to be commended for making this wonderful work available to a wider audience by means of this high-quality English translation. — *Wade Kotter, Weber State University.*

**Helfand, Jessica.** *Reinventing the Wheel: Volvelles, Equatoria, Planispheres, Fact-Finders, Gestational Charts*. . . . New York: Princeton Architectural Pr., 2002. 159p. alk. paper \$24.95 (ISBN 1568983387). LC 2002-532.

For too long, we have chosen to identify printed matter that does not neatly fit our categories of cataloging and description as “ephemera,” that is, material that is transitory by design and thus neither intrinsically important nor worth the labor of cataloging. We have, in effect, institutionalized a self-fulfilling prophecy. Thus, ephemera—postcards, menus, advertisements, broadsides, pamphlets, and the like—have become the unloved orphans of research libraries. We have squirreled them away unsorted in filing cabinets and boxes, when we have saved them at all. Sometimes we wish that they would just go away.

According to the *OED*, an ephemera (or an ephemeral) is an insect (or something else) that lives for only a day. And yet, the very ephemera that are barely

visibly on the edges of our radar screens have been around for a lot longer than a day. Our collections contain “ephemera” that are hundreds of years old. And, if we toss in papyrus grain receipts, at least two millennia old. Why, then, continue to confer on them a pejorative label? Ephemera do survive and often are eloquent pieces of historical documentation.

This by way of introducing you to a book that might slip past you, Jessica Helfand’s beautifully designed and presented introduction to her collection of printed ephemera. Helfand collects those marvelous rotating wheels that can do anything from basic arithmetic to casting horoscopes and beyond. These are the nineteenth- and twentieth-century descendants of volvelles. Rare book librarians will be familiar with volvelles as the intricate paper dials in sumptuous early modern astronomy books. There they served both decorative and practical functions, allowing readers to manipulate the dials to calculate astronomical phenomena and predict events. The last days of the Ptolemaic universe generated increasingly complex and ingenious sets of volvelles. Anyone who has ever thumbed a copy of Peter Apian’s *Astronomicum Caesareum* (1540) will know what I mean.

The evolution of volvelles from artifacts of the printed book to freestanding versions generated an increasingly diverse repertoire of superimposed printed circles. As the author notes, “Twentieth-century volvelles—often referred to as ‘wheel charts’—offer everything from inventory control to color calibration, mileage metering to verb conjugation. They anticipate animal breeding cycles and calculate radiation exposure, measure chocolate consumption and quantify bridge tips, chart bird calls, convert metrics, and calculate taxes. There are fortune-telling wheels and semaphore-charting wheels; emergency first-aid wheels and electronic fix-it wheels; playful wheels that test phonetics and prophylactic wheels that prevent pregnancy.”

Fine, but so what? Why take this stuff seriously? For two reasons, I think. The

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first has to do with what the late Don McKenzie referred to as the “expressiveness of the artifact”: These concentric wheels are intensely evocative of their contexts. Whether those contexts be World War Two or America’s ongoing obsession with diets and health regimes, these calculating wheels can provide scholars with quirky and revealing ways into sociocultural milieus. Among other things, they “empower” users (to resurrect a term) in moments of challenge as well as in moments of play. Primary source material of this ilk may not, in itself, sustain a monograph, but it is capable of adding nuance and emphases in unexpected ways.

The second reason to take these artifacts seriously is a bit more abstract, but no less compelling, at least for this reviewer. Helfand is a designer, and her book seems to be aimed primarily at members of her own tribe. Her message to them has to do with the new opportunities for design applications based on circularity and “kinetic thinking” rather than on static grids and squares. Her collection is thus a working library for her and perhaps her gift to colleagues. But this doesn’t mean that there is nothing here for us.

Wheel charts may be one of the earliest and most persistent types of interactive information media. It is the array of interactive possibilities latent in superimposed circles that interests Helfand and should interest us. From the standpoint of the history of books and reading, volvelles and their more recent progeny present historians with alternative examples of “reading” and learning. When Helfand talks about the “merits of kinetic thinking,” she may not have the authority of the academy behind her, but she does suggest a potentially rich approach to interactive media that deserves further exploration.

Even if the reader is unimpressed by this reviewer’s enthusiasms, she or he should still make a point of looking at this book. If nothing else, the remarkable display of twentieth-century wheel charts provides a rich and fascinating tour of an

underappreciated genre of printed matter.—*Michael Ryan, University of Pennsylvania.*

**Scholarly Publishing: Books, Journals, Publishers, and Libraries in the Twentieth Century.** Ed. Richard E. Abel, Lyman W. Newlin, Katina Strauch, and Bruce Strauch. New York: Wiley, 2002. 318p. alk. paper \$29.95, (ISBN 0471219290). LC 2001-6154.

This publication provides a unique view into the world of scholarly publishing. Despite the large number of books now coming out in the field of publishing history and the flood of books critical of the current state of education, there are no works that treat so thoroughly the history, current situation, and future prospects of scholarly publishing. In addition to articles by librarians at the front lines of change, there are vibrant essays by some of the prime movers in publishing, bookselling, and library technology. Formats and topics as diverse as books and journals, microforms, CD roms, scholarly reprints, print on demand, e-books, and i-books are discussed both historically and in the current context.

The variety of perspectives provided by this amalgam of publishers, librarians, authors, booksellers, and journal dealers reflects the book’s genesis at the Charleston Conference and in its journal *Against the Grain*. The Charleston Conference is already in its twenty-second year of bringing together all of the disparate elements in the scholarly publishing equation. It is a venue where librarians can confront publishers about pricing, where publishers can respond with questions about the “Napstering” of information, where copyright issues can be debated, where predictions about the future of libraries and publishing can be proposed and debated. In sum, it is a forum where all parties interested in scholarly publishing and the library market can meet face to face.

The two lead editors, Richard Abel, a seminal figure in scholarly bookselling, and Lyman Newlin, a veteran bookman with more than sixty years’ experience in