Clay Shirky. *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborators*. **New York: Penguin Press, 2010. 242p. Index and notes. $16.**

In his 2008 book, *Here Comes Everybody: The Power of Organizing Without Organizations*, Clay Shirky explored how the Internet empowered groups outside of traditional organizational structures. His 2010 book, *Cognitive Surplus: How Technology Makes Consumers into Collaborators*, expands that theme, expertly examining how and why individuals choose to join these technologically-enabled groups and analyzing how these groups are transforming modern communications. Defining "cognitive surplus" as "the free time of the world's educated citizenry as an aggregate" (9), Shirky uses examples from around the world. These include everything from a crowd-sourced service to track ethnic violence in Kenya to the LOLCats of ICanHasCheezburger.com, all in order to analyze the source of our cognitive surplus and the ways it can be harnessed effectively. In a world of participatory archives and a focus on developing new user groups, Shirky's observations and recommendations are pertinent to archivists striving to grow communities locally and online.

Cognitive Surplus is divided into seven chapters. The book begins with Shirky's definition of "cognitive surplus" and introduces his case for the source of this asset. He argues that, for decades, television served as the primary medium for the use of free time. Individuals played the role of consumer, digesting entertainment provided by corporate media without a means to react or converse. The Internet, however, presented an opportunity for these individuals to repurpose their free time by becoming contributors or even

creators instead of passive consumers. New social technologies allow for the aggregation of this free time, allowing us to "treat free time as a general social asset that can be harnessed for large, communally created projects, rather than as a set of individual minutes to be whiled away one person at a time" (10). Individuals now have the ability to contribute to a larger group conversation and spend their free time focused on subjects they are passionate about.

The following three chapters explore the hows and whys of cognitive surplus. Shirky argues that flexible, inclusive, and cheap media technologies have set a foundation for public contributions outside of traditional media outlets. These technologies, in turn, allow for public expression of two primary motivations–a personal desire to be recognized as a knowledgeable resource and a social desire to belong and make a meaningful contribution to a group. The Internet in particular provides an opportunity for social technologies and motivations to meet, creating "a way for groups to create new opportunities, at lower cost and with less hassle than ever before, and to advertise those opportunities to the largest set of potential participants in history" (128-129).

In chapters five and six, Shirky analyzes how these groups build their communal culture and can contribute to a larger public mission. He states that "culture isn't just an agglomeration of individual behaviors; it is a collectively held set of norms and behaviors within a group" (134). It is a way for building and sharing collective knowledge, assuming that the members of the group share "assumptions about how it should go about its work, and about its members' relations with one another" (143). New social media outlets allow these groups to form and grow without geographical

limitations. Additionally, these outlets allow groups to self-determine their mission and focus. Groups can be loosely formed and created primarily for entertainment. They can be developed as a resource for a limited population or the general public. Or they can be focused on what Shirky calls "civic sharing"–a group "actively trying to transform society" by creating a real change in their everyday world (173).

Shirky concludes his book with recommendations for harnessing and guiding the cognitive surplus in useful, meaningful ways. He argues that successful communities are social and supportive in nature, providing group members with value and motivation to contribute and experiment. These groups grow and improve in response to community needs, adapting without requiring the members themselves to adapt. Shirky closes by imploring the reader to think of useful ways to contribute to and develop the cognitive surplus. He states that "the opportunity before us, individually and collectively, is enormous; what we do with it will be determined largely by how well we are able to imagine and reward public creativity, participation, and sharing" (212).

The cognitive surplus described by Shirky provides a clear opportunity for archives and archivists to harness the collective efforts of researchers and passionate amateurs to build, enhance, repurpose, and promote our holdings. A number of archival institutions have developed crowdsourcing projects focused on transcriptions and description enhancement. Contributors may add valuable social metadata, but, if the group is fully realized, it can provide even greater benefits to the archives. The National Library of Australia's Australian Newspapers Digitisation

Program, for instance, began by asking its group to correct text transcriptions of articles. The group gradually expanded its role by suggesting new titles for digitization, raising funds for the program, and developing workshops and webcasts to educate others on the program and its use.

The development of this sort of active communal program, however, requires archivists to cede a level of control over the archives' description and development. It compels archivists to embrace change and accept the potential for failure as well as an opportunity for success. Additionally, it demands a certain trust in the community group–recognition that "citizen archivists" (a term used in similar crowdsourcing projects led by the National Archives) are passionate but also knowledgeable and reliable.

As Shirky effectively argues in *Cognitive Surplus*, individuals actively seek ways to contribute their free time to a project or cause that interests them. Archives and archivists need to critically examine their current outreach efforts, questioning how these efforts facilitate conversation. A one-way transmission of information, with the archives poised as the sole resource for reliable information, will not effectively reach an audience seeking true engagement. By incorporating Shirky's recommendations and building on successful relationships and projects, archives can reinvent their presence in the social media world as a place for community engagement with archival records–a place where the cognitive surplus can be harnessed to further enhance our mission. As Shirky notes, "We [should] look everywhere a reader or a viewer or a patient or a citizen has been locked out of creating and sharing, or has been served up passive or canned experience, and [ask]: If we carve out a little bit of the cognitive surplus and deploy it here, could we make a

good thing happen?" (213). Our answer to that question can only be found when archivists are willing to open their doors, their collections, their metadata, and their conversations to the community.

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"DigitalNC: North Carolina's Cultural Heritage," http://digitalnc.org. North Carolina Digital Heritage Center, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Reviewed June 14, 2012.

DigitalNC, with the slogan "North Carolina's Digital Heritage," is an online repository containing digital collections from institutions across the state. The site is presented by the North Carolina Digital Heritage Center, located at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, but is truly a joint initiative. Support is provided through the State Library of North Carolina with funds through the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) and through the University Library at UNC-Chapel Hill. There are 89 participating institutions representing 46 of North Carolina's 100 counties contributing close to 24,000 items (as of June 14, 2012). Contributors include colleges and universities, museums, historical societies, public libraries, and other cultural institutions. Although some contributors may currently have only one item in their collection, there is the potential for growth and expansion, especially if UNC-Chapel Hill is able to continue to provide staff, guidance, and equipment for the initiative. An advisory board with members from across the state provides more support by