

(Courtesy of David Proudfoot. Used with permission.)

David Proudfoot

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Today I will not be going into the specifics of how I got to this time and place or theorizing the mechanics by which it may have been achieved. Since arriving this has been, understandably I think, all that has occupied my mind. But I have written enough about this subject in the entries of the past weeks and I am still no closer to resolution of the question. Today's entry will be much different, for I have finally figured out where, exactly, I am.

I have been staying the past couple of days with a young man named David Proudfoot. He has taken me into his room under the assumption that I am a "pre-frosh." From what I have gathered from materials in his room (he has many books, as do all the students, my invention must have succeeded), he is a student at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It seems that these pre-frosh are people visiting the school, deciding if they want to go there. I figured I would not correct him, as this would be the perfect guise to cover the ignorance of my general situation.

As I had never heard of this Massachusetts, I did some more research yesterday while he was at class. I walked across the concrete paths, narrowly escaping being trampled by the roaring, beeping, mechanical beasts I have described in previous entries and entered a shop whose sign read *Store 24*. In here, I found a map (many printed copies were available very cheaply, it was great to see yet another application of my work) of this place called Massachusetts. I was able to establish my location by

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referencing some of the signs I had seen at the road intersections with those on the map. It appears I am in a city called Boston, and very near the coast. But what coast?

I picked up a different map. This map seemed to be for an entire country called the United States of America. Massachusetts, it seems, is just one of the fifty states I counted on this map. It is located in the Northeast coast of what looks like a very extensive country. This, of course, brought up more new questions than it answered. Where could this massive country have come from? Surely in the five and a half centuries I had been dormant, governments could have fallen and borders been reformed, but this land mass looked like nothing I had ever seen. Had the continents shifted so quickly? Was I even still on my home planet, the Earth?

I decided this was an important enough question to risk exposing who I really was. When Mr. Proudfoot came back from class that day I approached him about the subject. I asked him to tell me about the United States. He said, "What do you mean about the US? Aren't you from here?" I said that no, I was in fact from Germany. I was relieved to find out that I had not revealed myself with this fact, as he replied, "Oh, you're one of the exchange students. I got ya. Well you must want to know a bit more about our history then?" When I replied in the affirmative he brought me to the most strange and wonderful machine I have ever laid my eyes upon.

"This," he said, "is my computer. Feel free to use the internet. Just click on Internet Explorer over there." I stared at the machine. All the letters of the alphabet, numbers, and punctuation were laid out on small squares in front of me. It immediately brought to mind the cases of type we had kept for the presses. However, these letters only seemed to move in and out of the machine and were not raised to print. I looked

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back at Mr. Proudfoot who immediately picked up on my confusion. “What’s the matter? Don’t tell me you’ve never used the internet before.” I replied, “Actually, sir, I am from a very small town in Germany. I have never used one of these internet machines.” After a moment of looking at me in a manner that suggested he was equally as puzzled as I was, he recovered and said, “This isn’t an internet machine, it’s a computer. You just access the internet through it.”

Mr. Proudfoot took the rest of his afternoon to help me learn to use the computer machine. It was an interesting, if not confusing experience. Apparently, much of the function of the machine has descended from my printing press! The first thing he taught me to do was to “type.” In a way, this is much like type setting type on the press. However, through mechanisms which I cannot begin to comprehend, only the one set of type laid out before me (I would come to find this is called the keyboard) was required. Simply striking these keys would make the corresponding characters appear on the medium in front of me, which Mr. Proudfoot called the screen. Now, it is important to note that the screen was rather large. The space the type appeared on was about the size of the sheet of paper...but it was much deeper, much heavier, and much harder. It did not seem to be much use. What good was this screen? It was hardly portable. You could not fold it up and put it in your pocket. I couldn’t imagine storing these screens, how much would space would even a single book take up?

When I brought these concerns up, Mr. Proudfoot laughed and took the “mouse” (a device used to move a pointer on the screen) in his hand. He moved the cursor over a button on the screen and clicked one of the devices buttons. Next to me, another machine came to life with a whirl of machinery. Only seconds later a piece of paper came out. I

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studied the leaflet closely. It was covered in printed text. It was perfectly spaced. The letters seemed perfectly constructed. No ink was smudged, yet I could tell it certainly ink that had formed the characters. The print job was all around flawless. Only then did I read the text...it was the words I had just typed. I looked at this printer and my eyes followed a small cable from it to the computer machine. That was it, just a small cable, no bigger than the diameter of my pinky, had transferred the type I had set on the screen to the printer. I looked back at the screen and to my astonishment I realized that I was wrong. The type had not been transferred, it was still there. It had been copied.

The computer had made for me, completely uninitiated in its ways, possible in minutes what would have taken hours or days on my machine by an skilled printer. I was overwhelmed. And as hard as it may be to believe, the most astonishing ability of the computer was yet to come.

After I had realized the computer and printer were capable of spreading ideas faster than I had ever dreamed possible with my press, we moved on to the reason I had been shown the computer in the first place. Mr. Proudfoot once again took control of the mouse. In an instant, the type I had laid out disappeared from the screen. A few seconds later, the screen was washed in white with a few multicolored letters in the middle that spelled out "Google." Below this title was a gray box, in which the computer's cursor blinked on and off, expectantly. "There you are," Mr. Proudfoot said, "Now you can look up whatever you want to know about the US. Just type in what you are looking for." So I did. I searched for United States of America.

The Google page disappeared. In its place, a new Google page appeared. At the very top of this page, a miniaturized version of the Google logo and grey text box were

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found. Below that were a few pictures of the United States, outlines of the same country I had found in the maps. The rest of the page contained titles in blue, with small descriptions underneath. I was interested in some of these titles, but the descriptions did not get me very far. Using the mouse, however, I was able to “click” on the titles and open up whole new pages. On these pages, too, were blue underlined words. I could click on these to bring up whole new pages...instantly.

The amount of information I was presented with in such a short time was shocking. I found the answer to my earlier questions quickly. Shortly after my time, a Spanish man named Christopher Columbus had set sail to the west, determined that the world was indeed not flat and that he could loop around and find the short way to India. While he was right about the world being round, he did not find India. Instead he found a whole new continent. There were two of them in fact, North and South America. The European countries sent people over to lay claim to the new world. The different countries went to war with each other for the land. Eventually, some of the colonists decided they didn't like being fought over, and they formed their own country, the United States of America. So it is still all there, the rest of the world I had known. This place is just a new addition.

Having missed all this, however, I must have had a million new questions. The internet brought me so many answers, and quickly. I couldn't believe the amount of information this little machine had stored. I asked Mr. Proudfoot how it knew so much. “It doesn't. It's all out there,” he responded, waving his hands in no specific direction, “on the internet. My computer is just hooked up to it. The internet doesn't know things,

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people know things. Then they type those things up and put them on the internet.” So there it was. All along, the power had been in the people, not the machine.

When I invented the printing press I knew it could have far reaching effects if people utilized it properly. I always thought it was the greatest triumph of my life, bringing the technology to let people spread their ideas easier, to give more people access to the knowledge of the world. The computer and printer had made this process even easier, but it is the internet that will take this idea beyond my dreams. I was amazed when the page came out of Mr. Proudfoot’s printing machine, but the information that is not even printed is the most revolutionary. Anyone with access to a computer and the internet can retrieve enormous volumes of information and opinions, more than all the libraries in my Germany combined. And all these same people can become publishers themselves, sharing their own ideas or adding to the collective knowledge of the society.

In my weeks here in 2005 I have seen the effects that my press has had on the world. Printed material is everywhere. Newspapers are distributed throughout the city, the students’ rooms are filled with large, illuminated text books, and smaller paper back books are found on every last shelf I’ve seen. But the effects of my invention will be dwarfed by the internet. In only the few days I have been using it I can understand. It provides instant access to any piece of knowledge that exists. Every time I need to know something now, I can just “Google it.” It would indeed seem that if it doesn’t exist on the internet, man kind has not yet discovered it.

So I finally figured out where I am. In a house, in the city of Boston, in the state of Massachusetts, in the country of United States of America, on the planet Earth, in the time of the Information Revolution.