

Romani involve biliteracy,³ the writers stress the importance of this phenomenon, which clearly needs further research and development.

The contributors offer original data and stimulating discussion, but the conceptual frame of the collection as a whole is weak. Is there anything like a mainstream in language use? I withhold my answer, but leave the reader with two observations. First, the issue deals with communities in Mexico, Nigeria, USA, the Netherlands, and Bulgaria; however, out of 190 bibliographical references (the presentation paper and the five main papers), only 38 are not in English, of which 27 are cited by the Mexican author. Second, one author stresses "America's tradition of tolerance-oriented language rights" (82). I cannot but think of Henry Ford: When told that there was a market for colored cars, he said, "They can have any color they want as long as it's black". Surely, whether one is in the mainstream or not depends on how far upstream one stands. This is not really an attractive image.

References

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3. This is also what we observe from most of the case-studies in a current volume (Tabouret-Keller et al. 1997).

GEOFFREY NUNBERG (ed.), *The future of the book*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996. Pp. xiv, 306. Hb \$45.00, pb \$14.95.

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A wag once said that the future will be much like the present, only different. The problem, of course, is which parts. Most projections of the cyber-future — by enthusiastic innovators, financial backers, and seekers — are not much committed to maintaining the current world. Nunberg's collection gives an alternative view from those embedded in the culture of print, some even in the culture of the scroll and manuscript: classicists, medievalists, librarians, novelists, literary scholars, intellectual historians, and historians of the book. The essays (and they are indeed essays in the digressive, multiple-minded, leisured, identity-seeking, and soul-searching tradition of Montaigne) exude book erudition, with untranslated passages in Latin, French, and Italian, and knowing references to authors and scholars over several millennia of European history, e.g.: "Few who pass this way will fail to have heard of his [Abbot Johannes Trithemius, of the Benedictine house of Sponheim near Frankfurt] book, printed in 1492, *De laude scriptorum*" (43).

The essayists are all open to, and some even enthusiastic about, computer-mediated communications; but their deep and detailed knowledge of pre-electronic literacy, and of the transformations that occurred as manuscripts and books established a central role in Western culture, provide valuable reference points against which to see the current cultural transformation. Even more revealing, for considering the cultural issues at tension in this moment of transformation, is the largely unspoken commitment of almost all the essayists (even those most ready to leap totally into cyberspace) to values of individual cultivation of consciousness associated with the high culture of the book.

Revealingly, in this collection the symbol of the book serves as a stand-in for all of print culture, and even for all literacy — although precursors such as manuscript codexes and parchment scrolls are mentioned in passing, to indicate the transience of cowskin and wood-chip media. Although gestures are made to newspapers, pamphlets, and other uses of print, discussions keep

returning to the separately bound, single authored, extended coherent production that invites serious and leisured contemplation, and to the culture conveyed by such artifacts. Regis Debray's essay, "The book as symbolic object," indeed explores and celebrates the western fetishistic attachment to the book, which for him provides mooring in the shoreless sea of signs. He sees the need for the openness of cyberspace to adjust to the urge for sacred enclosure. Raffaele Simone, "The body of the text," explores the recent historical coming together of the idea of the closed text: authored, perfect (complete and unified), and original. Simone sees the text's body being dissolved as electronic text returns us to variations of medieval forms of consciousness.

Several essayists attend to the ways electronic text extends the representational form, and thus our experience of reading, beyond that available in enclosed spaces of word-centered books. Luca Toschi, "Hypertext and authorship," describes an electronic edition of Manzoni's *The Betrothed*, a 19th century novel that pushed the boundaries of print by interweaving text and graphic; the electronic hypermedia format seems the fulfillment of Manzoni's vision. George Landow sees "Twenty minutes into the future," describing increased capabilities of electronic books to manipulate typography, create moving text, afford simulation and visualization, link and jump text, and connect to the entire Internet. And for Jay Bolter, in "Ekphrasis, virtual reality, and the future of writing," the graphic capability of electronic texts has ushered in a "breakout of the visual," allowing us to escape the limited word.

The essayists' recurring concern for the consciousness of an individual reader places this collection within the high cultural tradition of the elite humanistic book. While occasional mention is made of phone books, manuals, and scientific journals as compilations of information, their functions, distributions, economic implications, and socially organizing force are hardly attended to. Even the states of literary consciousness evoked by popular romances millions of times daily, on subways and buses during commuting hours, are not considered. When cheap editions are mentioned, they are "Modern Library, Everyman, and the Oxford Classics" (210). What the collection concerns itself with is the experience of the educated humanist, alone with a favored book or with eyes glued to the computer screen. James O'Donnell, in "The pragmatics of the new: Trithemius, McLuhan, Cassiodorus," considers the changing concepts of cultural continuity of intellectual elites, on the cusp of change at the beginning and end of manuscript monasticism, as guides for our considering cultural continuity at this moment.

Patrick Bazin, "Toward MetaReading," considers the new forms of textuality, and their implications for the culture that libraries will propagate. Michael Joyce, "(Re)placing the author: A book in the ruins," celebrates the pleasures of post-modern consciousness. He offers a rhapsodic exploration of the de-centered, de-authorized aesthetic in virtual reality:

The last time I was in actual virtual reality, no sooner had I donned the helmet than I went running full speed for the edges of the representation, boundary testing, bursting through, blowing away the whole wire-frame world into a landscape of countless, brilliant ruby dice, each spinning letter or numeral a particle of the code, each an error exception. (288)

A few of the essayists do step back from the individualized world of texts and consciousness to look at the social world within which readers and texts live. Paul Duguid, in "Material matters: The past and futurology of the book," turns a skeptical eye toward the imagery of supersession and liberation that pervades much discussion of the electronic future; he points out that any form of communication (e.g. newspapers) is embedded within processes of material and social production and circulation. This perspective is examined in greater detail by Carla Hesse, "Books in time," who considers the modern literary system (though she seems to have only the upper strata of literate activity in mind) as a socio-commercial arrangement, deriving from cultural and political struggles in revolutionary France. She reminds us that book-writing, book-reading, and the states of consciousness evoked occur within particular economic and social matrices, and that economic and political choices shape the kinds of cultural experiences available. She casts our current choices within a narrow dichotomy, both parts of which are elite western humanistic formations (28): Are we to sustain self-constituting and accountable citizens of a democracy? or are we to advance the future of continuously and spontaneously recomposing postmodernist subjectivities, inhabiting an increasingly imaginable, technocratically managed empire? However, she does see the issues as more than that of the pleasures of consciousness evoked by representations.

Curiously, Umberto Eco, by far the most eminent of the humanists in this volume — who in literary culture represents the pleasures of arcane knowledge, and the conundrums of post-modern consciousness — is the least encumbered by the interests, habits, values, and perceptual frame of the literary classes. In his afterword, he sorts out the uses of the book and the computer screen, the literacies required of Wall Street and Hollywood, the coherence of Fellini films, and the pleasures of disrupted TV zapping. He recognizes that culture and society are made of many practices among many

kinds of people with different pleasures, interests, and work; and that words, graphics, and dynamic multi-media have long and multiple histories, which will continue, complexly. He starts with Victor Hugo and Plato, but ends with Rube Goldberg.

The one essayist who is not a professional humanist, Geoffrey Nunberg — the editor of this volume, and a research scientist with Xerox PARC — suggests why the humanist position is important to consider in thinking about future literacies. In "Farewell to the Information Age," he carefully and thoroughly critiques the ideology of information, which dominates thinking about communication in cyberspace. If information is an inadequate notion to comprehend the function and impact of new media, then we must attend to the social and cultural practices of which communication is part.

One place to start that inquiry is with the recognized advocates of culture who have been confronting the new media and looking back on their own past. They have interesting tales to tell. But they also bring with them the social and cultural formation that has written Culture with a capital C, and has made it the province of cultured individuals who indulge the leisured pleasures of the mind, whether in print-space or cyber-space. The questions most raised for me by this collection are not about the artifacts of print and electronic book, but about the societies and cultures mediated by various forms of communication. What social space will the continuing humanist traditions occupy in electronic media? What other cultural formations will find their space in the new domains that are opening?

Notes

WILLIAM A. SMALLEY, a missionary linguist well known for his studies of Southeast Asian languages and his contributions to the study of writing systems, died in December 1997 in Connecticut, at the age of 74. After receiving his doctorate in linguistics from Columbia University in 1955, he worked for the American Bible Society in many parts of the world, and particularly in Laos, where he was instrumental in developing a practical roman script for the Hmong language; this continues to be used by the Hmong in their worldwide diaspora. From 1978 until his retirement ten years later, Smalley was Professor of Linguistics at Bethel College, Saint Paul, Minnesota.

Smalley's publications included *Manual of articulatory phonetics* (Tarrytown, NY: Practical Anthropology, 1961); *Outline of Khmu structure* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1961); *Orthography studies: Articles on new writing systems* (London: United Bible Societies, 1964); *Phonemes and orthography: Language planning in ten minority languages of Thailand* (Canberra: Australian National University); and *Linguistic diversity and national unity: Language ecology in Thailand* (University of Chicago Press, 1994). Perhaps his most important book is *Mother of Writing: The Origin and Development of a Hmong Mexican Script* (co-authored with Chia Koua Vang and Gnia Yee Yang; University of Chicago Press, 1990). This book describes in detail a totally novel writing system