Errol Miller *New Construction / Collective Thought*

Around Dead Man's Curve
the key is ideas,
man
& his avant-garden (could be the USA, themes
of both the individual and the collective mind.)

Fast-forward to tomorrow.
This is the future.
Yeah, it includes love
and dreaming.
(Times 2 or more.)

But there is this question: when the door
is opened,
will you enter, Cool Daddy,
will you enter?

Contents

26 Twenty-Six Not-So-Easy Pieces

Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl

This paper was delivered at the ATypI Conference in the United Kingdom at the University of Reading in September, 1997. Using an abecedary order, the challenge and future of language, typography, and technology in various juxtapositions are examined. Implicit in the presentation is a critical posture that includes comparison of book and screen, comparison of typographic history and future, the need for language reform and user studies and an examination of technology's broad impact on human communication. The twenty-six not-so-easy pieces are intended to make unexpected connections and to provide critical commentary on current practice and expectation.

Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl is the editor and publisher of this journal and teaches communication design at the Illinois Institute of Technology.

Intsitute of Design, IIT
350 North Lasalle Street
Chicago, IL 60610
idpoggenpohl@id.iit.edu

Visible Language 32.1
Poggenpohl, 5–32

Rhode Island School
of Design
Providence, RI 02903

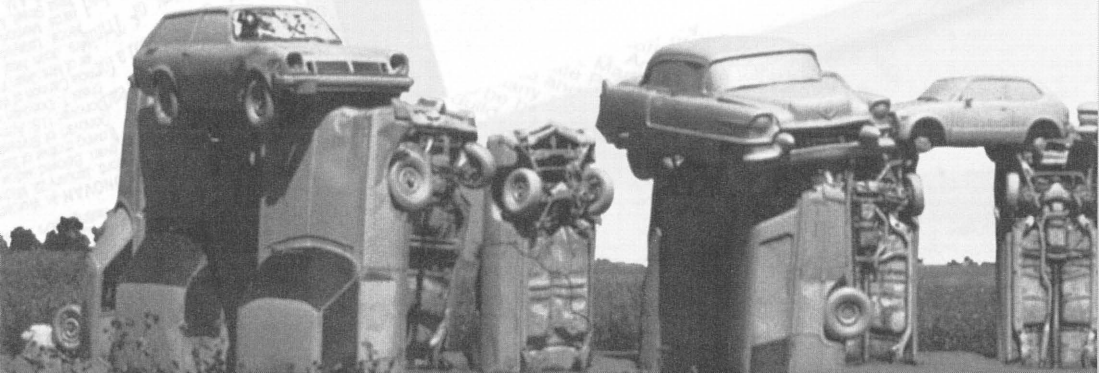
Appropriation

It seems fitting to begin with a gesture to the host country of this ATypI conference even though the gesture takes us far afield of typography. Sometimes by thinking rather obliquely we get new insight about whatever troubling situation we are trying to address – in this case appropriation – which is easily damned, defended, or ignored. Let me draw an analogy to typographic appropriation. Conjure, if you will, an image of Stonehenge in your mind – ancient, created with care to mark the seasons, still controversial with regard to its method of construction – an icon of dramatic scale.

Contrast with this Carhenge on the high plains of Nebraska, created as the activity focus of a family reunion. New, created with attention to structural and spatial imitation, it marks a season in an extended family's life. Easily constructed with machines compared to Stonehenge, it is an ironic comment on American life – a one-line joke.

Now think about all the "appropriated" type faces... the technical translations, the so-called improvements, the energy spent copying and slightly modifying... Are these appropriated faces a sign of creative bankruptcy? Have the possibilities of alphabetic form from a technical, cultural or aesthetic viewpoint been exhausted? Has ironic commentary on the past become the only means for typographic engagement?

See *Fonts & faces.*



homage to the Book

In his book *The Gutenberg Elegies,* Sven Birketts laments the decline of books. He writes: "A change is upon us – nothing could be clearer. The printed word is part of a vestigial order that we are moving away from – by choice and by societal compulsion. I'm not just talking about disaffected academics, either. This shift is happening throughout our culture, away from the patterns and habits of the printed page and toward a new world distinguished by its reliance on electronic communications."[1]

Because we are overwhelmed with the amount of information available to us and the speed with which new information is developed and distributed, we are moving into an era in which it is no longer practical to possess information personally. Value is shifting from possession to the ability to access and use information. Let someone else store it and maintain it. Consequently we will see increased computer use – we will read more on the screen. Reading will be less immersive and more selective.

This century has seen the birth and expansion of the artist's book. Books will not disappear, but will be valued as experiences and desired as possessions. They will return to being special, carefully created objects rather than mass-produced, throwaway, consumable items.

BOOK

print

preformed

permanent

static

sequential

alphabetic

citations

filtered

Glack of Conventions & control

The conventions of the book do not translate to the screen – we are adrift in uncharted territory without our alphabetic guide. Where the book is permanent, static, sequential, alphabetic and filtered – the screen is fleeting, animated, hyper-linked, keyworded and – in many cases – unfiltered.

See *Multimedia.*

Preceding pages:

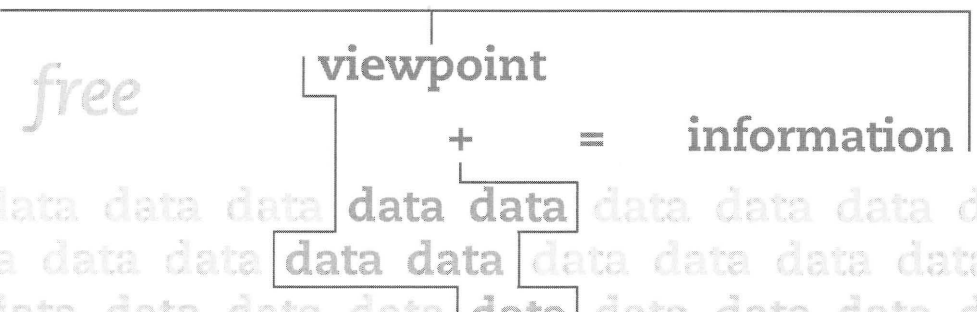
A *Carhenge, conceived and created by Jim Reinders, was dedicated on the summer solstice of 1987 on the high plains of western Nebraska.*

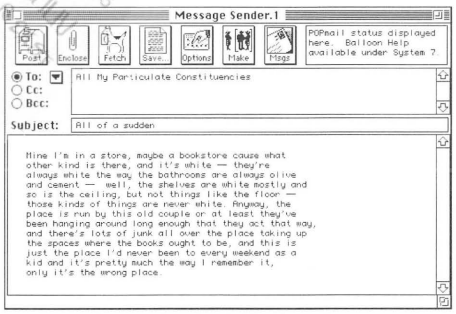
B *An artist's book developed at the Rhode Island School of Design, Graphic Design Graduate Studies, in 1991 by Christine Klufts.*

Data

There is a tendency to confuse data with information. Data has no story – it is just stuff. But if we examine data through a viewpoint and give it a story, it becomes information. Information feeds back altering both data gathering and viewpoint. The interactions are an iterative cycle.

In the information economy, all text is data and data is money. Data is indifferent to use and takes on the characteristics of a medium of exchange. "I'll trade you two mailing lists for an endorsement."





smiley face

censored

laughing

Email & emoticons

As early as the late eighteenth century when typography was commonplace and letterforms seldom revealed a calligraphic origin, the impersonality of print was recognized. The author's opinions, hesitations and strength of feeling were not revealed in the neatly ordered typographic presentation.

Two centuries later we find ourselves using email – the most emaciated typographic form. This is a region of uninflected language, quick, digitally pure ASCII, bloodless, immediate, but empty of affect. Enter the emoticon. Also pure ASCII, but quirky, conveying affect, playing on our ability to see and read faces nearly everywhere.

See *Handwriting*.

Fonts & faces

While technology opens new possibilities, it is measured by the quality of the just superseded technique. Phototypography was compared to metal type and found wanting. Nevertheless, when phototype commercially came on the scene in the sixties, it provided easier production and an economic advantage. This simpler and faster photographic reproduction from drawing to final form made type design feasible for more designers to consider. Both real and imagined type designers emerged from the woodwork – a "flowering" of new faces became available. It is interesting to note that the special craft and cost of production in casting a metal face served as a gatekeeper, enhancing quality and limiting the quantity of faces.

Phototypography opened the floodgates of type design. A quick reference phototype catalog from this era presents the sublime and the ridiculous in alphabetical order.[2] Among my favorites are Split Ends which foreshadowed the "shampoo planet" generation;[3] Watusi Drop Shadow which deserves recognition for being politically incorrect. Some designs defy both reading and description.

And now we have digital production with scans, curve algorithms, software assists, et cetera.

See *Appropriation*.

Kilo 10^3

1,000

1,000,000

1,000,000,000

Mega 10^6

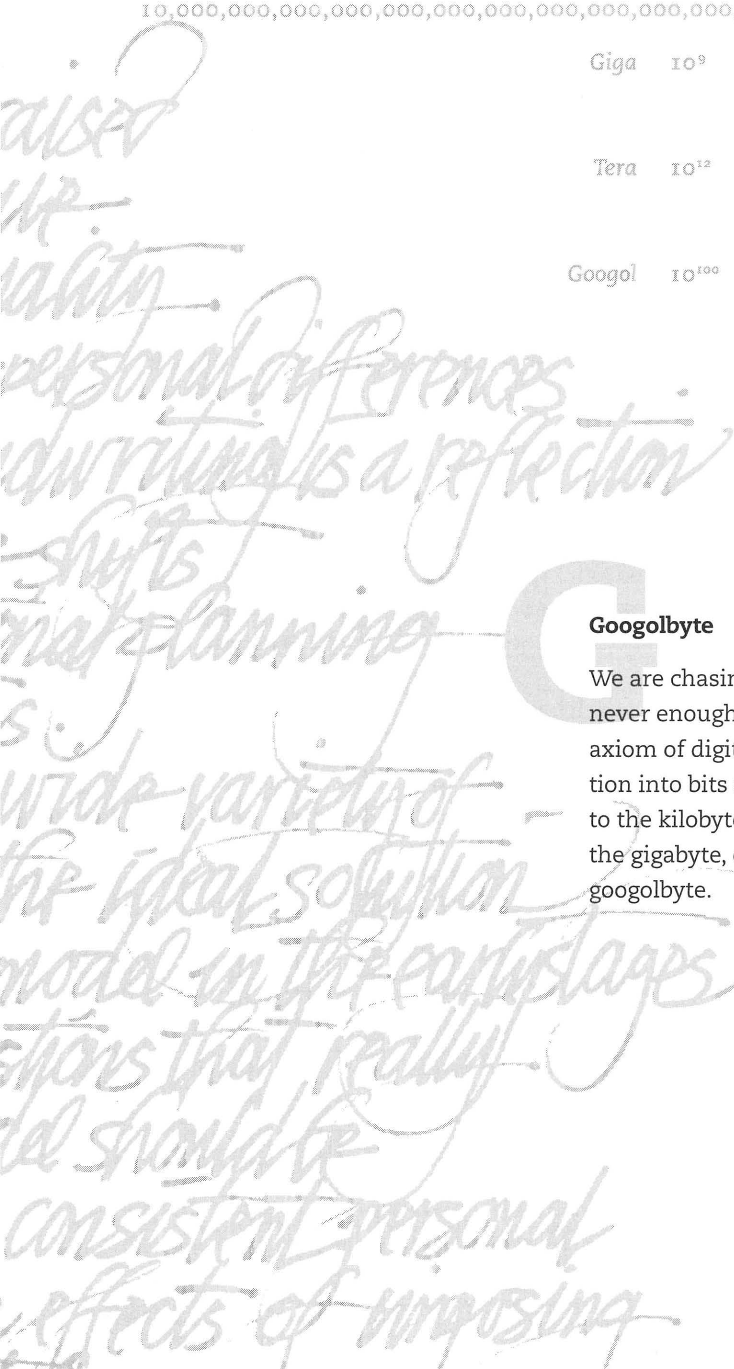
1,000,000,000,000

10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,

Giga 10^9

Tera 10^{12}

Googol 10^{100}



Googolbyte

We are chasing memory. There is never enough. It has become an axiom of digital life. After our initiation into bits and bytes, focus shifted to the kilobyte, now the megabyte, the gigabyte, ever onward to the googolbyte.

H *Hand lettering of designer/calligrapher Jan Baker, a faculty member at the Rhode Island School of Design.*

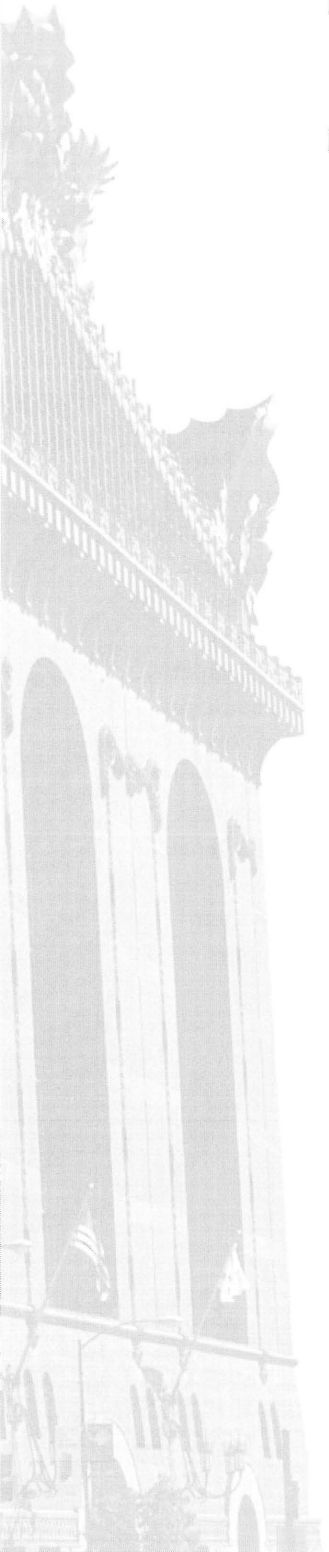
Handwriting

A long history of scorn is attached to writing clearly and legibly. Penmanship was looked at as a mechanical skill with humble people earning a living through its use. Herman Melville's short story "Bartleby the Scrivener" gives a poignant account of such a person, one who today we would describe as homeless. In the past, the cultivation of an illegible hand was actively pursued as a sign of good breeding – a letter that was inconveniently read served to indicate the gentility of the author.[4] Today we hardly need to cultivate a difficult hand – it seems to happen quite naturally.

Periodically in the business press, we see statistics demonstrating time and money lost due to illegible handwriting. Does the speed and efficiency of using email compensate for this loss? Can voice verification or a retinal scan replace the demonstration of authenticity we attach to handwriting? From a humanistic standpoint what is lost? Have you sent or received via email a sympathy note or congratulations on some personal milestone? It is an odd experience and one usually accompanied by an apology for its impersonality. Children increasingly learn keyboarding at an ever earlier age to accommodate computer use. Does their development of a "hand" suffer?

Despite the recognition at the Type90 conference in Oxford that individuals could create personal typefaces based on their handwriting, there is something odd about mechanizing the idiosyncrasies of personal script. The real tension between handwriting and typography revolves around "presence" and efficiency – formal visual eloquence and utility – the immediacy of one's individual marks or the intervention of digital equipment.

See *Email & emoticons.*



Institution

Institutions are subject to change, but they change ever so slowly. On a macro level there is the library and on a micro level there is the book with the thorny institution of copyright on a sub-micro level. The missions of these three institutions are related but they are now being undermined by the technological developments of new media.

The ability to "scan, save and capture" serves to archive ideas and images for future reference. This is not unlike the release of scholarly energy turned from "copying manuscripts" to thinking, expanding and generating new material after the printed book became common. With the saved elements an argument can be built or weight can be referentially added to a position or viewpoint. But these captured items can also serve as appropriated thought and image which too easily pass for an original in the hands of an intellectual pirate.

Here is the "new" Chicago Public Library – it looks like a remnant from the distant past. The bad news is that it is built to last. What is a library in the twenty-first century? What is a book in this century? Can intellectual property be protected? Our inherited institutions seem out of step with present circumstances and require a critical examination.

See *Appropriation, Book, Googolbyte.*

Jargon

In his book *Plastic Words, The Tyranny of a Modular Language*, Uwe Poerksen states: "Language crystallizes consciousness and forms an intermediate world... it institutionalizes and sanctions social and historical practise."[5] He goes on to discuss the aura that words have and how "expert" speech colonizes the vernacular. Technology in particular exports its vocabulary to shed a strange new light on things. I listen to the techno-talk of some of my colleagues and pick up *Wired* magazine on occasion to tune in on the buzz. Jargon serves to make a group cohesive – it establishes group identity. Jargon may ultimately replace the geographical diversity of language.

1 *The Harold Washington Library, Chicago's central downtown library.*

Klingon

People with their various languages are in increasing contact and conflict. Some twenty-eight hundred languages are in use today and of these about four-hundred have a written form – even fewer have a typographic form. It is sobering to think that there may have been as many as ten-thousand languages several centuries ago when people were more isolated.[6] Let me give you a personal example of languages in contact.

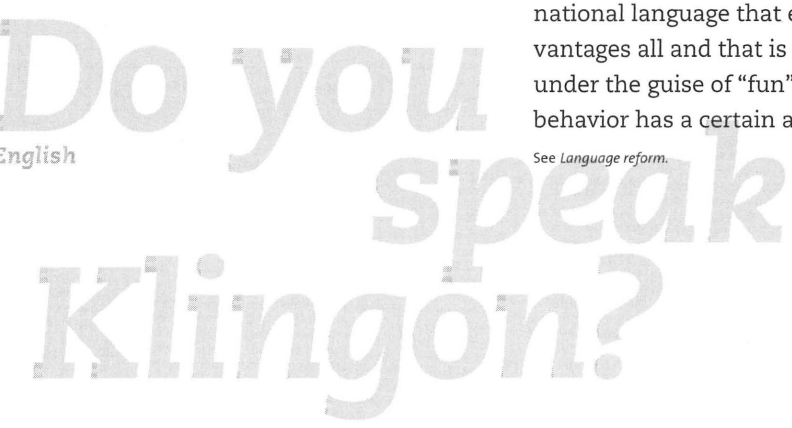
Several years ago I was traveling in Tanzania and stopped at a bar in Arusha where a television was playing an old Elvis Presley movie set in Mexico. It was originally filmed in English, but was dubbed in Spanish with Swahili subtitles. I wondered what the Tanzanians understood about the American culture of the 1960s and what they knew about the conflicting ideas of American independence, with its counterculture expression, in relation to the more traditional cultural norms of Mexico. I wondered whether the translation to Swahili was carefully done. Cultures in contact: American, Mexican, and African. Languages in contact: English, Spanish and Swahili.

There have been numerous attempts to invent an international language that would be easy to learn and equitable to all national languages. All these attempts have failed. I.A. Richards summed up the practical problem with artificial languages: "If you are going to the trouble of learning a language you need to feel that you will get a return for your toil this very year. A man may plant an orchard and wait six years for his apples: but six months is long enough to wait for verbs and prepositions to bear fruit. You do not want access merely to a limited and artificial literature, or to a few other speakers and correspondents. You want a vast and undelayed expansion of your contacts... The realization that the speakers of any artificial language are unlikely to increase as rapidly as the inhabitants, say, of Madagascar, is a fatal damper."

Buoyed by the use of computers to break codes during World War II, scientists thought that computer translation of natural language was just around the corner, but the problem has proved more difficult than anticipated. Current translation programs afford a head start in translation but fall short of an automatic solution. Insightful translations do not result from simple correspondence between languages but from an understanding of context and consideration of the dispositions the words evoke.[7]

Klingon? Here is an example of an international – nay, intergalactic – language. This artificial language of *Star Trek* fame was created by linguists based on their best understanding of language tradition. While you may not consider it a serious contender, introducing a new international language that equally disadvantages all and that is available under the guise of "fun" or marginal behavior has a certain appeal.

See *Language reform.*



Language reform

As the tempo of life accelerates, sentences are getting shorter and syntax is getting simpler. Over the past four centuries, English sentences have become dramatically shorter, dropping from fifty words to twenty with a structure that increasingly relies on juxtaposition.[8] We don't know the long-term impact of electronic media including speech and email on written English, nevertheless language is dynamic and subject to change. The question is should we actively alter it or just monitor its inevitable natural evolution.

There are at least two obvious routes to language reform: spelling reform and rationalizing the relationship between sounds and characters. Both rationalize orthography. English spelling was debated as far back as the sixteenth century and only began to approach standardization with Johnson's *Dictionary* in 1755. User-friendly English spelling does not exist. This has an impact on literacy acquisition for natives and second language users alike.

At the ATypI conference in Oxford in 1990, Walter Jungkind proposed to address language reform directly by examining the sound–character relationships between English and the roman alphabet. We know some sounds are represented in multiple ways – we know some characters are in this sense redundant. Others, including George Bernard Shaw and Herbert Bayer, have made similar observations. Some have proposed entirely new writing systems, while others, like Herbert Bayer, have proposed modifying the existing character set.[9] While the problem of representing the sound/image relationship has been recognized, there has been no serious discussion of a solution or a strategy for its implementation.

In contrast, the Korean language, Hangul, was reformed in 1446 to replace Chinese ideograms. Its alphabet consists of twenty-eight characters that clearly differentiate consonants, which are compact and geometric, from vowels, which are largely linear. The simplicity and logic of the written language makes it easy to learn. Phonological analysis demonstrates that Hangul was the product of deliberate planning.[10]

Recently in the *New York Times*, Spanish author Gabriel García Márquez wrote a wonderful Op-Ed piece called "Words Are in a Hurry, Get Out of the Way." In it he says: "We [must] simplify our grammar before our grammar simplifies us. Let us humanize its rules; accept from our indigenous languages... the great, enriching lessons they can teach us; assimilate with speed and efficiency technical neologisms before they seep in, undigested; ...let us discard orthography and bring more rationality to written accent marks..."[11] He was, of course, referring to Spanish.

Language should be an enabling technology.[12] It continues to change – why not address the problem of language reform and direct change to enable easier acquisition of literacy?

See *Klingon*.

L *A sample of modified characters in Herbert Bayer's basic alphabet, 1959. An example of Upwards' Cut Spelling which takes removal of surplus letters as far as possible.*

Multimedia

As a species we have moved through various stages in sharing information. The invention of writing gradually replaced oral memory. Since Gutenberg text has held a privileged position. But now things are changing. Scholars have written about the relationship between the sensory structure of information and human cognition. Learning theory tells us that engaging more than one sense – taking a multi-channel approach – enhances memory and learning.

New media presents us with a multi-channel approach to the delivery of information. But as yet we have no model of when to write, or read, or speak, or show or move aside from the computer to manipulate a real tactile world. Working through the possibilities will help to develop the conventions and controls (mentioned earlier as "C") that are missing at this time. What we must remember is that *we* are the measure of what is good – technology should not dominate us.

See *Conventions & control.*

Navajo

During World War II, Navajo indians from the southwestern United States were code-talkers in the Pacific war theater. At this time only a handful of non-indians spoke Navajo. Using a natural language among native speakers who were also bilingual in English provided speed and efficiency in transmitting information. The integrity of the code-talker transmissions was never broken by the Japanese who thought they were working on an artificial code.[13]

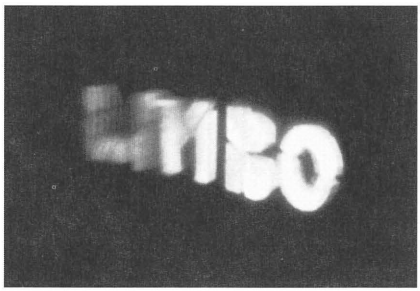
Languages without writing systems are disappearing. Their disappearance is a loss from the standpoint of understanding the variety of human experience. Among the most active agents for the development of writing systems for oral languages are missionaries. An example of a "missionary script" is the Inuit writing system developed by Anglicans in Canada's eastern arctic as early as the mid-nineteenth century. It is a syllabic approach to writing much favored by the missionaries as it is easy to learn and minimal literacy can be achieved quickly.[14] In contrast to the more familiar appearance of Navajo, Inuit syllabic text looks indisputably different and is distinct from the dominant colonial language.

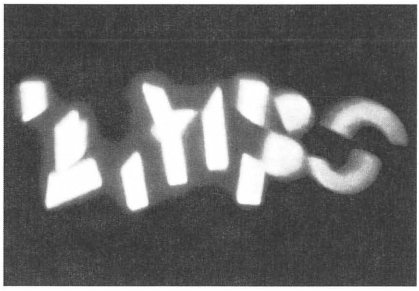
See *Klingon, Language reform.*

Ako ánáábízhdoo'niid,
Nihí daohchíjhgo
nihí'é'él'į' t'áá
dayínóhtą doo
biniyé Diyin God yee
has'áanii nahjį kódał'į!

M *Images developed at the Rhode Island School of Design, Graphic Design Graduate Studies, in 1989 by Laurel Shoemaker.*

N *Contrasting visible languages: Navajo, which uses a modified roman alphabet, and Intuit, which uses an invented set of geometric characters.*





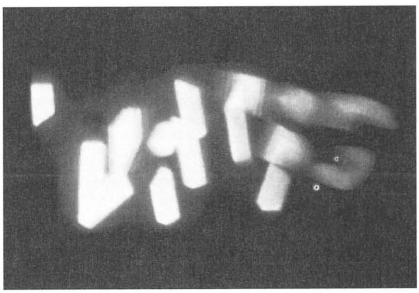
Orality

Secondary orality, a concept developed by Walter Ong,[15] reflects on the nature of the oral in contemporary culture. He finds it is not direct and spontaneous – much of both radio and television is delivered from a written script. In primary orality, speech drives writing, now writing drives speech and we have come full circle.

Poetry

Poetry has a long history of challenging language norms. Since Apollinaire and Mallarmé, poetry has been challenging typographic and visible language presentation norms as well. Eduardo Kac is a contemporary poet who follows in that tradition by exploring new media poetry. His holopoetry is at the leading edge of interactive media. The viewer/reader sees the poem in space and time responsive to his or her movement and position. The poem reveals itself not linearly or simultaneously but through fragments. According to the poet, "what matters is the creation of a new syntax, exploring mobility, non-linearity, interactivity, fluidity, discontinuity and dynamic behavior only possible in holographic space-time."[16] Poetry is about pushing limits, aesthetics, transcendence – even communication. Our attention is thus drawn to poetic exploration that uses technology positively, not for translation of past conventions, but to open new language transactions.

See *Multimedia*.



O *Images developed at the Rhode Island School of Design, Graphic Design Graduate Studies, in 1988 by Lisa Aronson.*

P *Eduardo Kac's 1990 white light transmission computer holopoem, "Souvenir d'Andromeda."*

Q

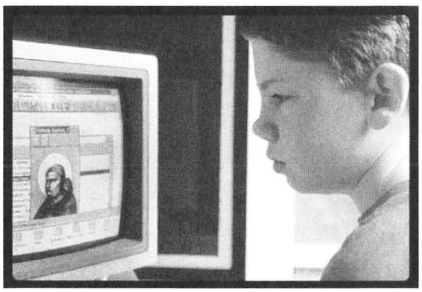
Quality

To create or appreciate quality takes time, attention and an understanding of context. Quality is an attribute of experience – the interaction between a person and aspects of the world.

Reflection

There is a substantial difference between the book and the screen in terms of reflection or the thoughtful consideration of what information means and how it connects to other ideas. Teachers are particularly concerned about this with regard to children and learning. They observe that children seem to demand action from the screen and tend to click around looking for it rather than reflecting on what is being communicated. There is a mania attached to the computer screen that is counterproductive.

The computer controls the situation – too much is possible, too much is expected. Despite the obvious attractions of color, movement, sound and surprise – teachers question what is productively learned. It may be that computer tools for learning are less effective for solo learning and more useful in collaborative learning.



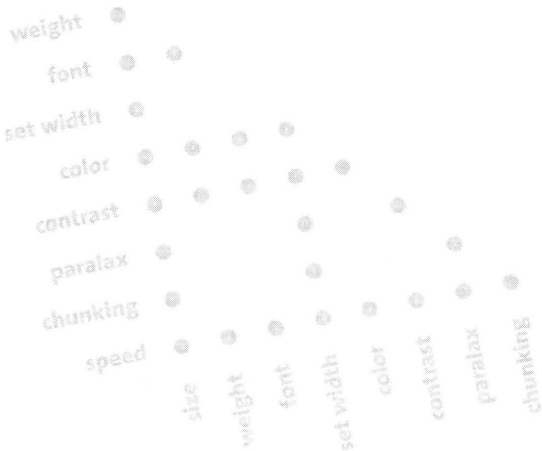
Storage and speed

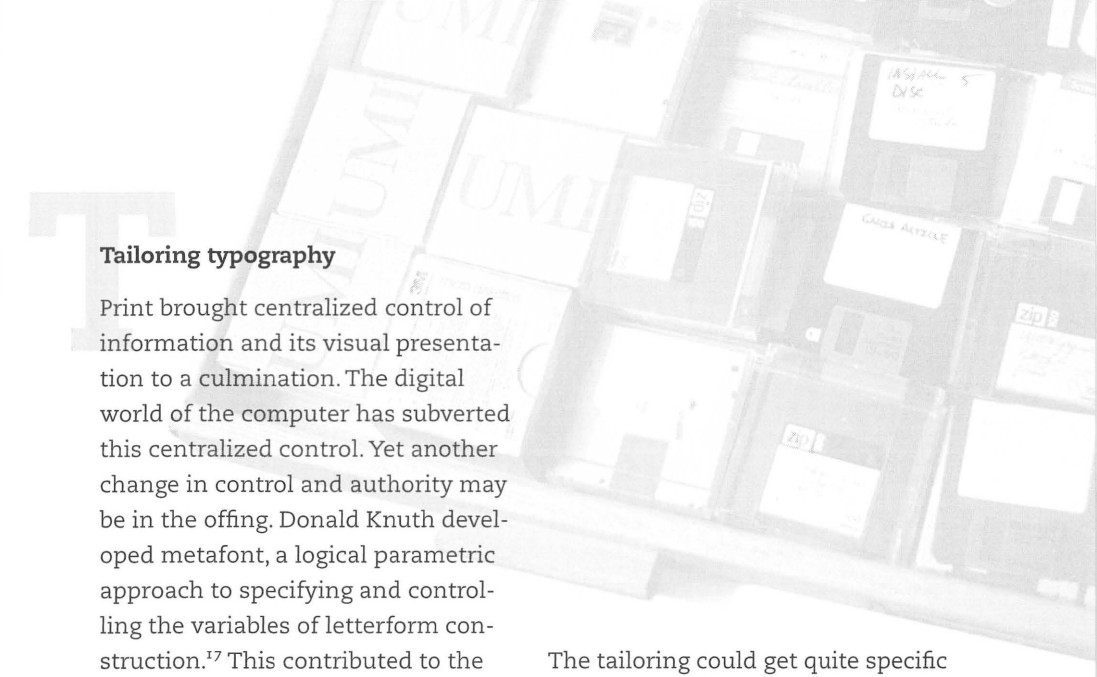
In Ray Bradbury's science fiction dystopia *Fahrenheit 451*, firemen burned books. The counterculture escaped to the woods and memorized what books they could save, in essence becoming living books. Here memory is biological wetware.

Gutenberg gave us multiple, identical copies and increased the survival potential of valued information in a physical distributed memory bank. Our libraries contain both treasured books from centuries ago and the latest releases. But now our collective memory is subject to a newer technology – the computer. It is prudent for us to consider what is more reliable: our personal and collective biological wetware, physical books or the ever-changing digital software and hardware storage?

As I open a drawer containing a decade of digital records, I am forced to consider whether indeed I can still open records made on now obsolete computers and whether the backward compatibility of software programs really will work over time. I come face-to-face with forced obsolescence, my dependency on technological tools, information loss and the consideration of its replacement value. Technology is opting for speed rather than reliability.

See *Googolbyte, Institutions.*





Tailoring typography

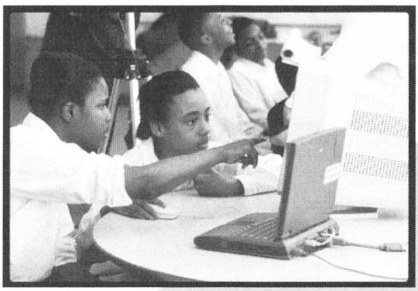
Print brought centralized control of information and its visual presentation to a culmination. The digital world of the computer has subverted this centralized control. Yet another change in control and authority may be in the offing. Donald Knuth developed metafont, a logical parametric approach to specifying and controlling the variables of letterform construction.[17] This contributed to the digital revolution in type design. Type designers and typographers could fine-tune the visual appearance of typography based on their own vision and aesthetic. Typographic control remained the province of the originator of a message.

But what about the reader? In the future it may be possible to tailor one's reading on the computer based on ergonomic, physiological and affective preferences. Screens are already hand-sized as well as environmental in scale. Perhaps a smart agent observes our preferences and learns to tune the screen for us. Perhaps there are defaults based on reading genre like stock market reports, news, mysteries, poetry, etc.

The tailoring could get quite specific based on physical human factors relating to the equipment one has, one's position relative to the screen, ambient light levels and so forth. Even visual acuity could be taken into account with correction for near- or far-sightedness, color blindness, glaucoma or even something dynamic like fatigue. For the user, the beauty of being able to personally tailor the typography means that they will not have to accept someone else's typographic choice, they will not have to make whatever crude adjustments are possible, or give up on the task at hand.

Adjustment variables might include size, weight, font, speed, parallax, set width, chunking, color and contrast. These may seem fairly predictable, but it is the subtlety of their inter-connections that create the challenge in conceiving of a user-centered typography.

See *User studies.*



U *Real students "use" a prototype while they are observed.*

User studies

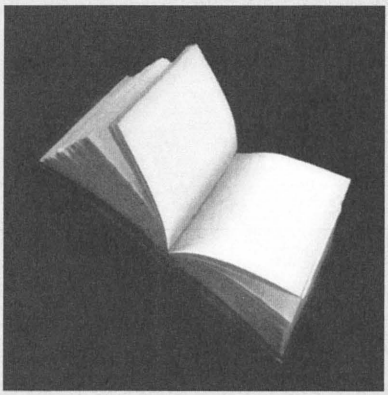
Tailoring typography is user (reader) centered. We are moving past the idea that readers are passive recipients of what we give them. They actively co-create the communication as they read. Technological changes now provide the means to accommodate the reader – the other half of the communication equation. At the Institute of Design in Chicago where I teach we are routinely engaged in user studies. We create communication prototypes and bring them into the field to see how users react to them. Using techniques from video ethnography, we tape the session for further review and adjust the design based on what we learn from our observation. This is an iterative process – one that continues until the user is at ease with the prototype.

Robin Kinross, in his readable little book *Fellow Readers,* argues for a conversational approach to typographic design as opposed to a postmodern, interpretive and idiosyncratic approach to typographic design.[18] Each of these approaches marks an extreme. On the one hand a purely conversational approach may easily be limited by existing conventions which may or may not be conversationally appropriate. On the other hand a purely idiosyncratic approach often does not respect the reader's time and energy. User studies are a way to mediate between these two extremes and offer a method with which convention can be challenged or interpretive approaches can be fine tuned.

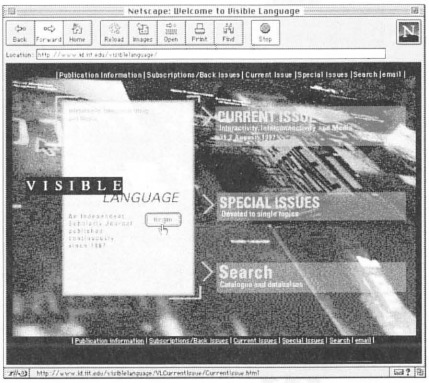
See *Multimedia, Quality, Tailoring typography.*

Visible Language

International, interdisciplinary, published continuously since 1967, the journal *Visible Language* is interested in the inter-related ideas of typography, technology, language and human communication. This abcedary demonstrates some of the journal's current interests.



Website



Caught between page and screen, *Visible Language* is on the web for your reading pleasure and to assist and stimulate continuing research in the relationship between language, typography, technology and human communication. Unlike the publication of a journal, a website is never complete. The real question is how often it will change and will the change be meaningful or meaningless. Technology is changing our expectations with regard to information: immediacy and change are valued over reliability and reflection. The website is an experiment, a site where new media and communication come into contact and take form, even if they are not quite ready for full flight.

Xenophobia

Xenophobia is definitely out. Cosmopolitan acceptance of and interest in other cultures and languages is in. Multilingual texts will increase. Sue Walker's work at this university, *Building Bridges: Multilingual Resources for Children*, examines the need for equal dignity and presence in multilingual texts even for children.[19]

See *Klingon*.

Y

Yoyoing

Many of us will yoyo – move back and forth – between the page and the screen. It is easy to become caught between the screen and the page, but it is important that we recognize and remember the differences in context between the two and do not try to graft the characteristics of the page onto the screen or the screen onto the page. They are truly different.

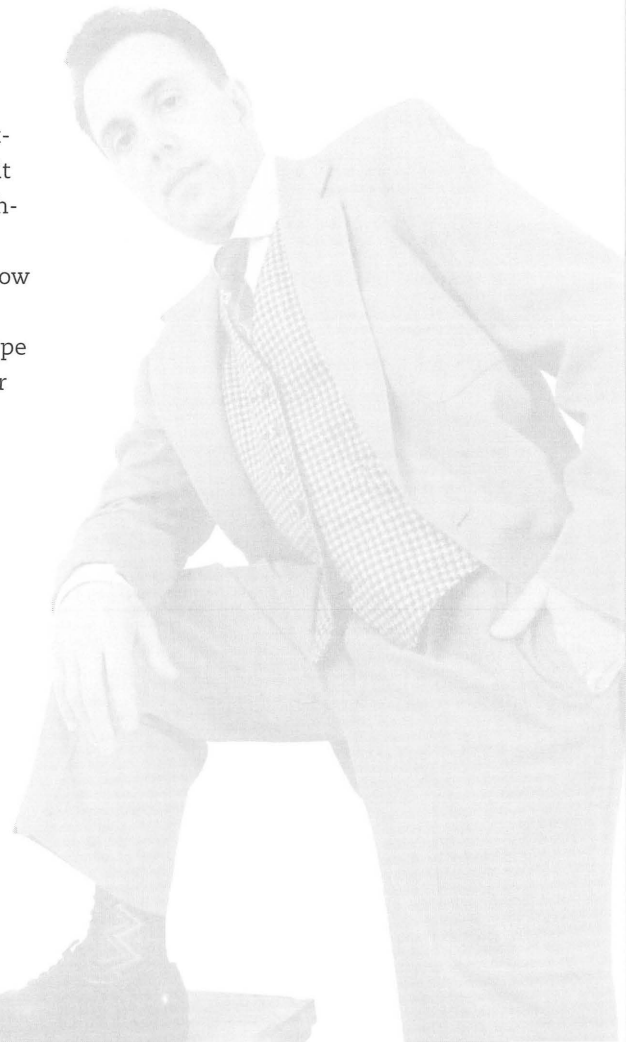
See *Book, Multimedia.*

Z

Zootsuit or zeitgeist

Zootsuit or zeitgeist concludes this listing. The former may need an explanation. A zootsuit is a flashy suit of extreme cut consisting of a thigh-length jacket with wide padded shoulders and peg pants with narrow cuffs. What is needed more zoot-suits – more eccentric and novel type faces – or the search for zeitgeist or that which characterizes the age? From my perspective, zootsuiting means running in place, while the search for zeitgeist in this time of change with regard to language, technology and global human communication moves us into the future – but a future that may be difficult to humanely control.

See *Fonts & faces.*



Z *Zootsuit photo by Kelly Costello.*

Notes

1 Birkerts, S. 1994. *The Gutenberg Elegies.* Boston: Faber & Faber.

2 Lettergraphics' *Do a Comp* workbook examples from the late 1960s.

3 Douglas Coupland wrote two books both addressed to the children of baby-boomers. He labeled these children "generation x." See Coupland. 1993. *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture.* New York: St. Martin's Press. Coupland. 1992. *Shampoo Planet.* New York: Pocket Books.

4 Thornton, T. P. 1996. *Handwriting in America, A Cultural History.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

5 Poerksen, U. 1995. *Plastic Words, The Tyranny of a Modular Language.* J. Mason and D. Cayley, trans. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press

6 Berlitz, C. 1982. *Native Tongues.* New York: Grosset & Dunlap.

7 Poggenpohl, S. 1995. The Dilemma of Communicating – Globally. *Design Innovation for Global Competition.* Chicago: ID Press.

8 Haussamen, B. 1994. The Future of the English Sentence. *Visible Language 28:* 1, 4–25. See also Yule, V. 1994. Problems That Face Research in the Design of English Spelling. *Visible Language 28:* 1, 26–47.

9 Burnett, K. 1990. Communication with Visual Sound: Herbert Bayer and the Design of Type. *Visible Language 24:* 3/4, 298–333.

10 Daniels, P.T., and Bright, W. 1996. *The World's Writing Systems.* New York: Oxford University Press.

11 Márquez, G.G. 1997. Words Are in a Hurry, Get Out of the Way. *New York Times,* August 3.

12 Poggenpohl, The Dilemma of Communicating – Globally.

13 Paul, D.A. 1973. *The Navajo Code Talkers.* Philadelphia: Dorrance and Company.

14 Daniels, et al., *The World's Writing Systems.*

15 Ong, W.J. 1977. *Interfaces of the Word.* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

16 Kac, E. 1996. Holopoetry. *Visible Language 30:* 2, 184–213.

17 Knuth, D. 1979. *Tex and Metafont.* Bedford, MA: Digital Press.

18 Kinross, R. 1994. *Fellow Readers: Notes on Multiplied Language.* London: Hyphen Press.

19 Walker, S., et al. 1995. *Building Bridges: Multilingual Resources for Children.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, Ltd. See also by the same authors, Designing Bilingual Books for Children. *Visible Language 30:* 3, 268–283.

Can't sell that written stuff,
implicit
middle-class wanderings from
the heart of Dixie
and other crossbreed villages.

Perhaps a revival?
Streets,
full of literary vagabonds,
rough ol'routes, baby,
looking for a lover, looking
for a radical new beauty, ooooo,
the Beatnik Revolution,
that is, & sort of,
nonconformity.
(You gotta leave some things behind.
You gotta accept surreal things.
You gotta get beyond
appearances.)

Minding the marketplace of tomorrow:
come on in, it is a way of life, now,
no more words that boomerang for
the syntax of the system
is not inert, we are
steadily moving
forward.

Writing in the Age of Email: The Impact of Ideology versus Technology

Naomi S. Baron

Tracing social change and the evolution of writing the American writing curriculum provides the base for an argument that considers changing ideology as a strong factor in shaping contemporary views about composition and technique in writing. Technology alone, the author argues, is not responsible for what is an increasingly oral approach to written language. Emergent dimensions of email that alter communication access, social interaction and response are examined as contributory factors.

This paper was presented at the Tenth Annual Writing and Computers Conference in September, 1997 at the University of Brighton.

Naomi S. Baron is professor of linguistics and chair of the Department of Language and Foreign Studies at American University in Washington, DC. Her current research interests include the historical relationship between spoken and written language and the linguistic character of email.

Department of Language and Foreign Studies
American University
Washington, DC 20016
nbaron@american.edu

Visible Language 32.1
Baron, 35–53

Rhode Island School
of Design
Providence, RI 02903

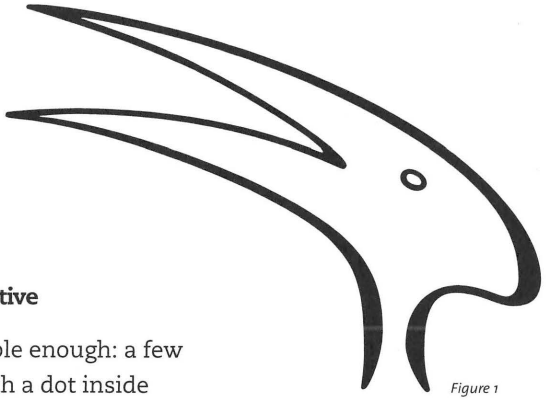


Figure 1

Birds or Antelope:
A Matter of Perspective

The drawing is simple enough: a few lines and curves with a dot inside (*figure 1*). Surely it must be some sort of animal. But what kind? The answer depends upon other knowledge or experience you bring to the interpretation. Add a swooping chest and you get a bird (*figure 2*). Add four legs and you get an antelope (*figure 3*).

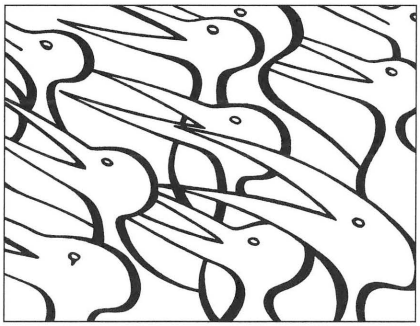


Figure 2

Figure 3

All observations, as Norwood Russell Hanson noted, are theory-laden (1958). This truism is as applicable in analyzing the effects of technology on human language as it is in rethinking the history of science. The way we look at seemingly "objective" data – from the movement of planets to the composition process – is inevitably colored by the cognitive and social models we bring to our studies.

The object of observation in this paper is written language and, ultimately, the writing we do when sending electronic mail across a network or the Internet. Our question is, what are the characteristics of this writing, and how did they get to be that way. The thesis, following Hanson, is that our observations of email are likely to be theory-laden. The perspective coloring the common view is that the linguistic characteristics of email, often described as a cross between speech and writing, emerge from the networking technology through which email is composed and distributed. This article will argue, instead, that the speech-like aspects of email are as much the product of ideological shifts regarding written American English over the past century as they are reflections of contemporary computer technology. These ideological transformations include changing assumptions about appropriate subjects for student compositions, differing positions about the importance of grammatical correctness, and contemporary thinking about the extent to which writing is monologue or dialogue. All of these ideological changes are integrally tied to shifts in higher and lower educational philosophy in America.

Composition in America

In just over one-hundred years, American notions about the place, form and purpose of composition in education have undergone profound alteration. Between the 1870s and today, the ideas of two educational reformers – one a chemist and the other a philosopher – led Americans not only to abandon classical models of education but also to elevate composition skills (in English) among the popu-

Adams, K.H. 1993. *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges.* Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press.

Baron, D. 1990. *The English-Only Question.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Baron, N.S. (in press). Letters by Phone or Speech by Other Means: The Linguistics of Email. To appear in *Language and Communication.*

Batson, T. 1988. The ENFI Project: A networked Classroom Approach to Writing Instruction. *Academic Computing*, February/March, 32-33, 55-56.

lace and eventually to emphasize self-expression as the *raison d'être* for writing. Some background on the demographics of mid and late nineteenth-century America is critical to understanding the subsequent course of written language in American education.

The national pulse: America in the second half of the nineteenth century

It is, of course, a truism that the United States is a nation of immigrants. The decades after the Civil War, especially between 1890 and 1910, brought large numbers of foreigners to American shores. With the exception of the Irish, the vast majority of these were non-English-speaking.

Since today's "immigrant" is tomorrow's "native," it has often been difficult to differentiate "foreigner" from "American." However, a common variable linking much of the American population of the late nineteenth century was their minimal level of formal education. Schooling beyond rudimentary skills was deemed neither necessary nor affordable by the majority of the farm-based or laborer populace. While states began requiring free schooling to be available as early as 1852 (in the case of Massachusetts), attendance was hardly the norm. As late as 1870, only two percent of all seventeen-year-olds graduated from high school. By 1900, that number had risen to 6.3 percent (Gere, 1987: 37).

Not surprisingly, the percentage of students participating in higher education was small. In 1770, the country boasted only 3,000 living college alumni (out of a population of about three million – see *Missions of the College Curriculum, 1977*: 20). A hundred years later, only one percent of the nation's crop of seventeen-year-olds later graduated from college (Gere, 1987: 37).

Yet like many immigrant and/or underclass populations, growing numbers of Americans recognized the importance of learning to speak and write "correct" English. At the grass roots level, this movement (redolent of its counterparts among the rising lower classes in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England) was evidenced

Bean, J. 1983. Computerized Word-Processing as an Aid to Revision. *College Composition and Communication, 34:* 146–148.

Besnier, N. 1995. *Literacy, Emotion, and Authority: Reading and Writing on a Polynesian Atoll.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bolter, J. 1991. *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Borup-Nielsen, G. 1995. *A Study of the Two Experimental Schools of C.N. Starcke and John Dewey.* Lampeter, Wales: Mellen University Press.

in trends ranging from growing sales of dictionaries to the formation, in the early twentieth century, of "Better English Clubs" (Drake, 1977: 19, 36). (See Crowley, 1989; Crowley, 1991 and Mugglestone, 1995, for discussion of language standardization issues in British English.)

The mid and late nineteenth-century educational push was further bolstered by an attitudinal shift about the very nature of the American English tongue. A century earlier, Noah Webster had displayed his revolutionary spirit in arguing that American English was distinct from British English, with its own vocabulary, grammar and spelling. But a hundred years later, the pendulum had swung in the opposite direction. American linguistic guardians (reacting, in large part, against the waves of immigrants) once more saw prescriptive standards (and British standards, at that) as needed bulwarks to maintain the purity of spoken and written English (Drake, 1977). This insistence upon prescriptive standards became an important theme in the subsequent rise of English composition in America; it only began to subside in the 1970s and 1980s.

A high immigrant population, low levels of formal education, grass roots movements to improve language skills and an emphasis on prescriptive standards all made late nineteenth-century America ripe for a national emphasis on English composition. The efficient cause, however, was a set of transformations in educational pedagogy that would profoundly alter notions about the relationship between spoken and written language.

Transformation from a spoken to a written pedagogical model

From the founding of Harvard in 1636 through most of the nineteenth century, American higher education bore two characteristics of relevance to our discussion. First, the mode of instruction was overwhelmingly oral. Students provided oral answers to questions posed verbally, recited memorized passages and regularly engaged in oral disputations and speech contests.

The emphasis on oral pedagogy was a direct continuation of the rhetorical model of the medieval and early modern English university. However, while recognizing eighteenth- and nineteenth-century rhetoric as spoken language, it is critical we be clear that this rhetorical style profoundly differed from everyday speech. Based on the rhetoric of Cicero and Quintilian, medieval and early modern rhetoric filled a related role in formal disputations, whether legal, political or religious. Regrettably, some contemporary discussions (e.g., Clark, 1990) confuse this earlier formal rhetorical mode with the conversational style of a lot of modern composition.

Second, the language of study was predominantly Latin, with some Greek added for good measure. In fact, the closest most college students of the day came to composition in English was through written translations of classical texts. This focus on classical languages, also an English import, was bolstered by Lockean (and ultimately Aristotelian) notions about the composition of the human mind. If we assume the mind is composed of a collection of faculties (such as reasoning, observation and attention), then education consists in exercising those faculties much as one would muscles. The content of the exercise matters less than how vigorous it is.

In America, proponents of the "mental muscle" theory viewed classical languages as the best form of mental exercise. Even if one eventually needed to speak and write eloquent English (as did future ministers, who constituted a significant proportion of the seventeenth- through nineteenth-century American college population), Latin was assumed to be a better avenue for sharpening one's skills, since presumably it was harder.

When they did write English, what did students write about? Lofty, impersonal themes such as "Can the Immortality of the Soul Be Proven?" or "Whether the Soul Always Thinks" (Myers, 1996: 38). More modern, individually motivated themes did not emerge until Charles W. Eliot and John Dewey profoundly altered national presuppositions about the goals of higher and lower education.

Eliot's model: adapting the German research university to America

When Charles W. Eliot became president of Harvard in 1869, he set to work changing the face of higher education in America and, in the process, altered lower education as well. Himself a product of both Harvard College and a pivotal stint in Germany studying chemistry, Eliot conceptually redefined Harvard's educational goals which, in turn, became the model for the rest of the nation.

Underlying nearly all of Eliot's ideas was his drive to adapt the German research university model to the United States. Eliot's changes included introducing an undergraduate elective system, eliminating requirements in the classics, building an advanced undergraduate and graduate research program (complete with seminars, research papers and scholarly publication), and, along with Andrew White at Cornell, instituting written examinations (Graff, 1987: 32). As part of the curricular revolution, the study of English – philology, literature and composition – assumed a new identity.

Early in his presidency (1872), Eliot appointed Adams Sherman Hill, a lawyer-turned-newspaperman, to assist the then Boylston Professor of Rhetoric, Francis James Child. Hill recast what had been a four-year traditional rhetoric program, emphasizing spoken and written grammatical correctness and literary style, into what would become higher education's ubiquitous one-year freshman composition course. Equally importantly, Hill introduced the first college placement examination in English, supporting Eliot's agenda for pressing lower education into raising its standards in English composition. The German model of higher education that Eliot so admired presumed that university students had learned to write in lower school. Until American lower schools could ensure the same tough standards, Harvard (and its sister institutions) would need to provide remedial service. (See e.g., Krug, 1961, for a selection of Eliot's writings on popular education. See also Brereton, 1995.)

Brereton, J.C. 1995. *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875–1925.* Pittsburg: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Clark, G. 1990. *Dialogue, Dialectic, and Conversation: A Social Perspective on the Function of Writing.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Coleman, J. 1996. *Public Reading and the Reading-Public in Late Medieval England and France.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cremin, L.A. 1961. *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876–1957.* New York: Random House.

But what were students to write about? In earlier decades, the themes had been set by the instructor in rhetoric. Hill, building on his newspaper experience, instead asked his students to write objectively about their observations and perceptions of everyday life. Hill's successor, Barrett Wendell, introduced the daily theme, intended to "teach a young writer to recognize and grasp the individual nature of experience" (Myers, 1996: 49).

By the end of the nineteenth century, the composition revolution at Harvard had profoundly affected many aspects of teaching the English language. Colleges around the country developed versions of Harvard's writing program, and English composition as a discipline began its inexorable separation from philology (soon to become linguistics) and from English literature (which was to become the province of the new, "scientific" English Department). But for our purposes, the most important effect of Harvard's revolution in composition was that a new purpose was defined for teaching writing. Instead of learning a rhetorically-based imitation of classical style whose goal was to expound on abstract themes, college students were asked to formulate their observations of individual daily experiences. While the required medium of expression was writing, the redefined theme opened the door to what would become in the decades that followed the expression of a personal voice. And over time, the expression of that voice, although in writing, came to sound more and more like speech.

Dewey's model: progressive education

In the same decades that saw Eliot's reforms in higher education, a new model of lower education was percolating across Europe and America. Froebel in Germany, Starcke in Denmark, Binet in France, Montessori in Italy, Francis Parker in Massachusetts, John Dewey in Chicago and then New York, and Abraham Flexner in New York all sought to redefine how a nation's children should be educated. Such efforts came to be known collectively as "progressive education," (see, e.g., Borup-Nielsen, 1995).

Crowley, T. 1989. *The Politics of Discourse: The Standard Language Question in British Cultural Debates*. London: Macmillan.

Crowley, T. 1991. *Proper English? Readings in Language, History, and Cultural Identity*. London: Routledge.

Danielewicz, J., and Chafe, W. 1985. How "Normal" Speaking Leads to "Erroneous" Punctuation. In S. Freedman, ed. *The Acquisition of Written Language*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 213–225.

Drake, G.F. 1977. *The Role of Prescriptivism in American Linguistics, 1820–1970*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

The term "progressive education" has been loosely applied to a spectrum of educational reform, dating back most recently to Rousseau. The common elements linking all of these movements include:

1 a child-centered (as opposed to teacher-centered) approach to education.
2 an emphasis on fostering creative self-expression in children.
3 the belief that children cannot be taught; rather, they learn by doing, aided by guidance from adults.
4 the view of schools as social (and socializing) institutions.

For the progressive education movement, school was not a place to drill students in skills or even to impart information but a venue for developing the child's individual potential as a member of society through guidance from teachers and association with age-mates. In Dewey's words, "the only true education comes through the stimulation of the child's powers by the demands of the social situations in which he finds himself" (Lang, 1898: 6).

In the United States, progressive education had an episodic history. It received a measure of recognition in the 1910s through the 1930s. None other than Eliot became the honorary president of the Progressive Education Association (founded in 1919), followed, upon his death, by Dewey himself. The movement receded during the Depression and World War II, only to reappear under influence from the British Open Classroom movement in the 1950s and, perhaps more importantly, as we shall see a little later on, from the Vietnam generation of the 1960s and 1970s.

While the general effects of progressive education would not be strongly felt in the United States until the last quarter of this century, Dewey's commitment to personal, creative self-expression in children had an early and profound effect on one area of the lower school curriculum: teaching writing. In 1920, William Hughes Mearns (an English teacher and writer) became the head

of the Lincoln School, a laboratory school founded by Abraham Flexner and run under the aegis of Teachers College at Columbia University. Dewey had moved from the University of Chicago to Columbia in 1905, and through Mearns' leadership, the Lincoln School was to become a continuing laboratory for Dewey's ideas on progressive education.

Mearns created for his students an English curriculum that focused not on historical analysis or grammatical correctness but on self-expression (Myers, 1996: 104). Following Flexner's injunction that students' "intellectual and aesthetic capacities ought to develop on the basis of first-hand experience" (Flexner, 1923: 100), Mearns replaced the traditional lower-school English curriculum of grammar, spelling, penmanship and literature with what he labeled "creative writing." Again following Dewey, he viewed his task as teacher to be one of guide, not instructor. Writing, Mearns said, is "an outward expression of instinctive insight [that] must be summoned from the vasty deep of our mysterious selves. Therefore, it cannot be taught; indeed, it cannot even be summoned; it can only be permitted" (1925: 28). As a form of self-expression, writing reflects one's own voice. In fact, he once described poetry as "when you talk to yourself" (Mearns, 1943).

Mearns' curricular innovations (and those of kindred spirits in progressive education) were to have two important effects on pedagogy later in the century. The first was on perceived relationships between spoken and written language. By emphasizing student self-expression and diminishing the role of teacher as expert, progressive education supported a model of writing as the transcription of thoughts initially expressed through speech rather than thoughts mediated by writing as a distinct form of language. This model was further reinforced by the assumption that the mechanics of "correct" writing should take a back seat to the unfettered expression of ideas.

The second effect was on pedagogical assumptions about what type of teaching was appropriate for what age student. Progressive education was designed for

lower school training. (Recall that in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, relatively few students completed high school, much less continued on to college.) Moreover, Dewey himself had argued that by the time children are about age twelve, their educational agenda should shift from cooperative to individually designed projects (see Cremin, 1961: 140–141). Yet ironically, the model of teacher as guide-on-the-side, originally designed for elementary and junior high school students, would later become the dominant American model for teaching college students across the curriculum. As a result, in contemporary America, there is often no serious place in eighteen years of formal schooling for the classical model of writing as a discrete form of linguistic representation, complete with its own standards for grammar, punctuation, spelling and style.

Post World War II America

Higher education in post World War II America was significantly affected first by veterans' benefits and then by an unofficial war half-way around the world. Thanks to the so-called GI Bill, over two million veterans of World War II poured into American colleges and universities (Myers, 1996: 159). A college education was to become the American expectation, not the exception. While the college curriculum of the 1940s and 1950s had been relatively traditional (Myers, 1996: 200), the Vietnam War (and the national attitudinal changes it engendered) fostered a different model: student-centered, dialogic, "relevant"; in short, progressive education.

The implications of this shift for the teaching of writing and for attitudes towards the written word more generally were far-reaching. Prescriptivism began falling into decline, heralded by the appearance of the descriptively-based *Webster's Third International Dictionary,* but fueled by a growing insistence upon spontaneous self-expression at the expense of edited prose. Transformations in the college writing curriculum reflected these political and social trends and were, in turn, instrumental in recasting

Flexner, A. 1923. *A Modern College and a Modern School.* Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, Page.

Gere, A.R. 1987. *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications.* Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.

Graff, G. 1987. *Professing Literature: An Institutional History.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hanson, N.R. 1958. *Patterns of Discovery.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

American notions about the relationship between spoken and written language.

Computers and Writing

Since World War II, composition programs in America have successively embraced three distinct (though sometimes overlapping) models of how writing should be taught, reflecting, in turn, three different assumptions about the goal of student writing. The first, a traditional model that has roots in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical rhetoric, takes the goal of writing to be imparting knowledge. Accordingly, writers are trained to focus on the product they are generating, with the expected attention to details of written mechanics and style. This model has persisted throughout the second half of the twentieth century, although with decreasing popularity.

The second, so-called "process" model, emphasizes the act of writing more than the written result. Students are encouraged to do considerable pre-planning ("pre-writing") as well as multiple drafts, but the prescriptive mechanics of written style are de-emphasized. In both the traditional and the process models, writing is seen as an individual activity. However, while the traditional model encourages objective presentation ("It appears that...," "One might argue that..."), the process model allows for more individual expression ("I think..."). In essence, the process model embraces the self-expression component of progressive education.

The third model is more social-dialogic. The purpose of writing is no longer expression of objective information or self-expression but what has come to be called the social construction of knowledge (see, e.g., Clark, 1990: chapter 1). Rather than being a solitary activity, writing is envisioned as a group conversation, utilizing not only peer review but even group composition. Conceptually, the social-dialogic model incorporates progressive education's views of schools as social (and socializing) institutions which, in Dewey's words, lead children to use their "own powers for social ends" (Lang, 1898: 9).

Hawisher, G.E., LeBlanc, P., Moran, C., & Selfe, C.L. 1996. *Computers and the Teaching of Writing in American Higher Education, 1979–1994: A History.* Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Heath, S.B. 1983. *Ways with Words.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Herring, S., ed. 1996. *Computer-Mediated Communication: Linguistic, Social, and Cross-Cultural Perspectives.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Kolb, D. 1996. Discourse across Links. In Charles Ess, ed. *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication.* Albany: State University of New York Press, 15–26.

As some (Hawisher, et al., 1996) have noted, developments in the use of computers to teach composition have capitalized upon the emergence of first the process and then the social/dialogic models of writing. The era of stand-alone word-processors made it possible to relegate writing mechanics to the computer, leaving the author free to concentrate on more "important" things, such as ideas. Word-processing also enabled writers to produce successive drafts without needing to rewrite or retype the entire text each time (see, e.g., Bean, 1983: 146).

Networked computing lent technological impetus to the third, social-dialogic model of writing. Trent Batson, one of the early pioneers of computer mediated communication for teaching writing, even argued that "some of the current theories about how to teach writing [seemed to be] developed specifically with networks in mind" (Batson, 1988: 32). More probably, we might argue that education in the 1970s and 1980s was ripe for progressive thinking, which drove models for teaching composition and much of the personal computer revolution more generally (see, for example, Reingold's 1993 discussion of the American counterculture roots of modern computing). The development of hypertext programs (e.g., Michael Joyce and Jay Bolter's *Storyspace* and the work of George Landow – see Bolter, 1991; Landow, 1992) helped move the notion of writing groups (for the purpose of peer review – see Gere, 1987) to the idea of group writing, where multiple authors create a single text *seriatim*. (See Murray, 1997, for current visions of the future of collective composition in cyberspace.)

The introduction of computers into the composition process facilitated – though it had not initiated – the shift of emphasis in composition from objective exposition to an interpersonal dialogue that is, as likely as not, more informal than formal. The fact that word-processors relegated the mechanics of writing to second-class status reinforced existing trends in manually-produced writing (e.g., to use pronunciation in written prose as if it were marking pauses in spoken discourse – see Danielewicz

and Chafe, 1985). The fact that networking incorporated interlocutors into the composition process (either as commentators or as co-authors) further confirmed students' beliefs that writing is a stream of thought or a conversation written down, not an entity in its own right.

Since we don't edit oral monologues or conversations, the role of editing in computer generated writing was also called into question. Nowhere has this fact become more evident than in the use of email.

Email and Written American English

The enormous success of email as a technology reflects the ongoing trend, at least in American English, for *writing* to approximate the structure and conventions of *speech* rather than functioning as a discrete form of linguistic representation. Yet when we probe the linguistic character of email, the story becomes yet more complex. For email has some characteristics of writing, some of speech, and some emergent qualities that belong to neither. Moreover, the formal properties of email as a system of linguistic representation are sometimes at odds with the ways real-world email users actually send and receive messages.

To understand the nature of email as a linguistic system, we need to answer three sets of questions:

1 What are the commonly assumed characteristics of spoken and written language? Are these characteristics reflected in actual spoken and written usage?

2 What are the commonly assumed characteristics of email? To what extent are they like spoken or written language?

3 What presuppositions do users bring to sending and receiving email? To what extent do these presuppositions derive from envisioning email as a form of speech, as a form of writing or as a new genre of communication?

There isn't the opportunity here properly to address these questions (see Baron, in press; Herring, 1996). How-

ever, by highlighting a few examples of "mismatches" between assumptions about traditional speech and writing on the one hand and real-world email usership on the other, we can get a sense of why email is frequently perceived as being more like speech than like writing.

Paradigmatic characteristics versus real-world user presuppositions

The literature on the relationship between speech and writing is, like Caesar's Gaul, divisible into three parts. One group of writers (see Coleman, 1996, for a good summary of this approach) lays out paradigmatic sets of characteristics that distinguish spoken from written language (for example, writing is more formal than speech; people say more than they write; speech is ephemeral while writing is durable). A second group of authors (e.g., Tannen, 1982) argues that the form and content of spoken and written language are nowhere as discrete – for example, under the right social circumstances speech may be much more formal than writing). A third group (e.g., Heath, 1983; Street, 1984; Besnier, 1995) eschews the whole structural discussion and focuses instead on the ethnographic conditions that lead speakers and writers in different societies to formulate linguistic messages the way they do.

Whatever one's theoretical position, it is nonetheless true that most language users in literate societies share certain assumptions about how they think writing differs from speech. These assumptions, which were traditionally inculcated through formal schooling, roughly parallel the analysis laid out by the first group of scholars, even though these same users may, in day-to-day writing, produce language much more like that characterized by the second and third perspectives.

The same dichotomy exists with regard to email. Paradigmatically, email is, for example, a durable form of linguistic representation. Unlike speech, email is typed, can be stored and can be printed out. Yet in actual usage, senders of email typically behave as if the medium is

Krug, E.A., ed. 1961. *Charles W. Eliot and Popular Education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Landow, G.P. 1992. *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Lang, O.H., ed. 1898. *Educational Creeds of the Nineteenth Century.* New York: E.L. Kellogg & Company. Reprinted by Arno Press, 1971.

Mearns, H. 1925. *Creative Youth: How a School Environment Set Free the Creative Spirit.* Garden City, NJ: Doubleday.

ephemeral (i.e., like speech). The clearest evidence of this user presupposition is the writing style that characterizes much of email.

Two examples illustrate this trend, at least in the United States, for email to follow the style of speech, not writing. First, unlike off-line composition, emails typically undergo little or no editing. In fact, many otherwise meticulous writers send "written" emails without rereading them, while they would never transmit the same information in a traditionally composed letter or memorandum without review.

Second, most Americans readily adopt an extremely casual style in their email, more akin to the informality of their speech than to the relative formality of writing. The relaxed tone of emails is evidenced both in terms of address (users shift more quickly to first names – or no salutations at all – than in off-line writing) and in the ease with which humor is incorporated into communication with people you have never met or with whom, even in face-to-face speech, you would likely be more reserved.

This last point highlights one of the emergent dimensions of email that transcends the dichotomous speech-versus-writing discussion. Email provides a point of entree for communicating with individuals with whom you would ordinarily have no contact or whom you would hesitate to interrupt, for example, with a telephone call. We send emails to heads of organizations with whom we have little or no opportunity to air our concerns face-to-face and to whom a letter would seem inappropriate or futile. Similarly, we email people with whom we have working relationships but whom it would be an imposition to call and too cumbersome to write.

Why are emails not viewed as social intrusions, while either a knock on the door, the ring of a phone, or a letter in the box might be so perceived? Because email is more like the chime of a clock reminding us of the hour than like a summons commanding our departure. We have some latitude about when (or whether) to reply. As with written communication, we can choose the conditions of

Mearns, H. 1943. Poetry Is When You Talk to Yourself. In *Challenges to Education, War, and Post-War: 30th Annual Schoolmen's Week Proceedings*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 154–157.

Missions of the College Curriculum. 1977. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mugglestone, L. 1995. *"Talking Proper": The Rise of Accent as Social Symbol*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Murray, J.H. 1997. *Hamlet on the Holodeck: The Future of Narrative in Cyberspace*. New York: Free Press

our response. At the same time, though, the socially acceptable time limit on responding is more akin to spoken language, since our interlocutor can be fairly certain that the message arrived and knows the technology enables a swift reply. As David Kolb observed, "Email offers focus and fast turnaround. A written letter unanswered for a month is not a serious matter; an email message unanswered for a month may signal the end of a friendship" (Kolb, 1996: 16).

Implications for the effects of email on written American English

What impact is email having (and can we expect it to have) on the way we produce the written word, at least in American English? As the number of email users continues to grow (currently, exponentially), we should anticipate that the nature of writing used in email will itself undergo evolution, much as word processing has (e.g., while an early generation of users typed or hand wrote drafts and only then input the text, today most computer users compose on-line). While the eventual future of email is unknown, some trends seem clear.

First, the amount of composition done at a computer – either as stand-alone "word processed" documents or as messages designed for computer mediated communication (be it email or chat room) – is increasing markedly. Since the same technology is used for composing all of this written text, the possibility for stylistic influence from text composed as email upon text composed as stand-alone word-processed documents is obvious.

Second, the move we discussed earlier towards group-oriented writing (either for peer review or to create collective products) is greatly facilitated by computer technology. The common use of email (or local networking) to transmit texts for comment or contribution also invites cross-over influences of email writing conventions onto traditional off-line composition.

Third, it seems unlikely that the influence will work the other way. One might, for example, be tempted to

hypothesize that as formal editing tools designed for word processing (such as spelling and grammar checkers) become increasingly available for email, at least the "mechanics" of email will begin to look more like writing than speech. The real issue, however, is one of motivation, not availability. Quite simply, why bother? Since the inception of these tools for word processing, an astounding number of people doing word processing have simply ignored the opportunity to do editorial cleanup on the computer, with the result (as many composition teachers know) that papers prepared on computers are often editorially inferior to those written longhand or typed, where students understood they were expected to check their work.

What have we learned about the evolving relationship between speech, writing and composition in America? In the nineteenth century, "composition" was typically oral, though modeled on written standards. In the twentieth century, writing is the pedagogical norm, though increasingly modeled on speech. Computer technology has influenced the teaching of writing, but generally in the directions that composition theory and broader educational philosophy were already leading. To the extent that composition is increasingly done on-line, it seems likely that the spoken-language properties of email will reinforce the increasingly speech-like character of writing that school and college pedagogy in the United States has been fostering since the late nineteenth century.

Beyond American Shores

This article has addressed the relative roles of pedagogy and technology in the changing relationship between spoken and written American English over the past one hundred and twenty years. What relevance does this discussion have for other times, other varieties of English, other languages? Why should anyone other than Americans care?

The answer comes in two parts. First, the characteristics of written language are always shaped by social, eco-

nomic, educational, legal, religious or technological variables at work in a given society, on a given language, at a given time. The history and future, for example, of Japan's tripartite writing system (*kanji,* two kinds of *kana* and *romaji*) is inseparable from the political, religious, and social history of the country since Buddhist monks first introduced Chinese characters nearly two millennia ago. Similarly, while neither spoken nor written registers have ever been standardized in the United States, England has a commonly acknowledged written language standard, though a far more restricted student body continues on to higher education to learn the language's intricacies. As a result, computer technology might have quite different effects on writing in England than in America.

The second part of the answer requires us to reflect on the international reach of American English and of American computer technology. Long before computers seriously arrived on the scene, English in general and (some would argue) American English in particular had become the closest modern contender for the title "international language," thanks, in part, to American GIs, movies and television programming. And while Americans may no longer make their own televisions or baseballs, they have a dominant world presence in networked computing. Arguments of national pride aside, the language of the Internet is overwhelmingly English, and heavily American English at that. Patterns of written American English on web pages, in chat rooms and in emails bombard an international readership. It seems likely that American writing styles, as represented by computer mediated communication, are destined to influence written norms both in other English-speaking and in non-English-speaking countries as well.

The remaining question, of course, is whether the directions in which written American English are moving are to be commended, condoned or condemned – but thereby hangs another tale for another time.

Myers, D.G. 1996. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880.* Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Rheingold, H. 1993. *The Virtual Community: Homesteading on the Electronic Frontier.* New York: Harper Collins.

Street, B. 1984. *Literacy in Theory and Practice.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tannen, D. 1982. Oral and Literate Strategies in Spoken and Written Narratives. *Language, 58:* 1–21.

Entering a new phase,
for rest, perhaps.
All the road graders
are silent, but not the music.
(Piano music drifts out of Victory Baptist Church.)
Philosophy, adapted into a religion for spirituality.
Each student must labor for six days,
clinging to the crumbling cliffs
of Earth.
There are no roofs over our heads.
There is no future in herding sheep,
Elemental greatness? Ask the Mayans.
Ask the hired hands from the Thirties.
Ask
the Confederates in the muddy fields
of imaginative battles won or lost.
Ethereal dreams,
they make me laugh, comparatively speaking
I am a young man
writing out
the complicated tracery
of my ancient history.

(I must mention Atlantis here.)

Give my love to Sasha.
Always there is joy in simple things.
The way the poem flows,
the rough rude hurts
of yesterday
that remain, somewhere,
leaning into sunset,
the flat land beyond the Delta
and the remnants of "home."
So my lines
surge out
caught between life and death again
in the midst of a stone-white glory, all
the comings, all the goings, all
the cosmic urges, the green
of the grass of Now
and the view
from an open window
in Milan,
an awesome distant charting.
Souls of glass, heavy machinery, men
and women on the road at night,
tramping through here, campfires
of last night and ghastly
images
of transcendental messengers
who also come and go
in the firelight
of man's
bumble-bee demise.

Paper Representations of the Non-Standard Voice

Mark Balhorn

People in the popular press as well as academia have some wrong ideas about how dialect renderings in literature evoke a non-standard voice. They think that graphic representations of dialect have a literal oral counterpart and that the worth of a dialect rendering lies in how accurately it depicts the spoken dialect in question. This paper demonstrates that linguistic accuracy is not and can never be a primary goal of writers who create effective renderings.

The primary semiotic potential of dialect renderings lies in the indexical meaning they derive from their opposition to standard written English, rather than in linguistic detail. Consequently, whether a writer is a speaker of the dialect in question or not has little impact on the effectiveness of the literary dialect rendering. When the renderings of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century white writers of dialect are compared with those of contemporary writers who purportedly speak the dialects in question, we see that though the authors of yesteryear and today often differ in the number and kind of features they choose to represent, neither can be said to be more accurate than the other.

Mark Balhorn is an assistant professor of English at the University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point. After spending ten years teaching English in Africa with the Peace Corps and at universities in Korea, he earned a Ph.D. in English Linguistics from the University of Wisconsin–Madison. His research interests include theoretical linguistics, second language acquisition and teaching methodology, the cultural impact of language teaching, and the socio-cultural meaning of dialects.

Department of English
University of Wisconsin–Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI 54481
mbalhorn@uwsp.edu

Visible Language 32.1
Balhorn, 56–74

Rhode Island
School of Design
Providence, RI 02903

In a recent book, David Olson points out that readers of alphabetic writing systems tend to assume that writing is "the transcription of speech."[1] Since learning to read and write is the means by which we become aware of language as a symbolic system distinct from the ideas we are trying to convey, we naturally come to think of our language "in terms of the entities in the representational system."[2] In other words, standard written English, the aggregate of all our conventions regarding the representation of our language on paper, is reified as the language itself and is thought to be not just a conventional, written representation of the linguistic system that speakers share, but to represent what actually comes out of people's mouths.

1 Olson, D. 1994. *The World on Paper.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 258.

2 Olson, *The World on Paper,* 259.

Though Olson is primarily concerned in his book with discussing the relationship between writing and its effects on cognition, the latter relationship, that between written representation and the spoken word, is just as important. The belief that the written word directly represents the spoken word was at the heart of much of the discussion surrounding the issue of Black Vernacular English (Ebonics) in the Oakland, California, school system. Margo Jefferson, drama critic for the *New York Times,* for example, in addressing this issue, makes the point that all dialects have expressive potential. She attempts to demonstrate that "Black English... can be spoken with beauty and power,"[3] and as proof, provides three paragraphs from Zora Neale Hurston's folkloric retelling of Genesis and the story of Moses in *Mules and Men.* Though Hurston's words may be beautiful and powerful, and the text evocative of language patterns and sensibilities of a genuine, African-American voice, it is nonetheless a written text, not a "spoken" one at all. This text may illustrate how eloquent African-American voices can be created through the medium of written English, but it demonstrates nothing about the expressive potential of *spoken* black English.

3 Jefferson, Margo. 1997. The Two Faces of Ebonics: Disguise and Giveaway. *New York Times,* January 7, C11.

This misconception, that a written word must have a spoken counterpart, is also found in academia, and in fact, appears to underlie some of the criticism leveled at the Black Vernacular English (BVE) dialect renderings of

nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American writers. Michael North, for example, claims that the African-American dialects rendered by Stein, Eliot and Pound "sounded a good deal more like Uncle Remus than any actual African-American speaker of the 1920s." North continues that it was the charge of African-American writers such as Claude McKay, Jean Toomer and Zora Neale Hurston to help African-American literature "fight its way out of the prison of white-created black dialect."[4] Recently, Bonnie TuSmith has noted that with the expanding varieties of language to be found in today's multicultural texts, both teachers and readers of literature need to become more "multilingual." Literature specialists reared on the "institutionalized and often formulaic Southern black dialect found in writers like Faulkner, Welty and Twain" need training in interpreting other varieties of English and understanding the cultures that underlie them.[5]

4 North, M. 1994. *The Dialect of Modernism: Race, Language, and Twentieth-Century Literature.* New York: Oxford University Press, preface.

5 TuSmith, B. 1996. The Englishes of Ethnic Folk: From Home Talkin' to Testifyin' Art. *College English, 58:* 1, 46.

TuSmith is undoubtedly right that readers and teachers of literature need to become familiar with the cultures behind the dialect voices found in multicultural novels today in order to properly understand them. She is also correct to say that attitudes toward the language varieties encountered in multicultural texts must change. Likewise, North may also be correct in claiming that in comparison to the Black Vernacular English renderings of McKay, Toomer and Hurston, the renderings of Stein, Eliot and Pound are lacking. But their characterization of the problem as being one of linguistic accuracy is off the mark. In claiming that the renderings of Stein, Eliot and Pound "sounded" like Uncle Remus, North seems to disregard the graphic medium in which these white modernists rendered African-American voices, as if the meaning of the texts only emerge after mediation by a spoken voice. Likewise, TuSmith's insistence on "monolingual" readers' "lack of language proficiency"[6] and consequent unpreparedness to read ethnic literature suggests that the effectiveness of a dialect rendering depends upon readers' fluency in the dialect in question, not upon their fluency in written English.

6 TuSmith, The Englishes of Ethnic Folk, 55.

Below, however, it will be shown that the worth of a dialect rendering lies squarely with the graphic representation on paper. How closely it corresponds to what speakers of the dialect in question actually say is of secondary importance. Moreover, since the semiotic potential of a dialect rendering is primarily indexical, effective renderings depend more upon readers' fluency in standard written English than on their familiarity with spoken varieties. Thus, though the dialect renderings of white writers from the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries may be different from those of today's writers of color, the differences must be characterized in some way other than linguistic accuracy. We will see that the differences lie in the particular non-standard features that writers choose to represent and the degree to which the graphic representation differs from standard English orthography.

Script as an imperfect model of speech

Even with a perfect orthographic system, unencumbered by the historical pressures that have produced the spelling conventions of modern English, an accurate portrayal of the spoken mode via the written would be impossible. Consider the task confronting linguists. We can assume that the linguist, free to use phonetic transcription, a symbol system that can, at least theoretically, represent every possible nuance of articulatory detail, would be capable of producing comprehensive renderings of speech. But this is seldom, if ever, done. As Macaulay points out, quoting Ochs, a representation that attempted to include every aspect of articulation would be so difficult to read, even by the audience of linguists for which it is intended, that it would be too "difficult to follow and assess."[7] Rather, linguists who transcribe speech are usually only interested in the aspects of the sound stream that convey meaning. They describe "only the significant articulations rather than the total set of movements of the vocal organs."[8] So complex is the polyphony of speech that even scientists must decide what to represent and what not to.

7 Macaulay, R. 1991. Coz It Izny Spelt When They Say It: Displaying Dialect in Writing. *American Speech, 66,* 282.

8 Ladefoged, P. 1982. *A Course in Phonetics.* New York: Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich, 23.

If those whose goal is to simply represent the sound system of a language cannot achieve complete accuracy, then certainly novelists and poets, who are primarily concerned with the meaning the sound system conveys, cannot either. Not only must writers represent both meaning and form simultaneously, but, in addition, their medium is not the socially neutral International Phonetic Alphabet; it is instead standard written English, a medium wherein symbols acquire meaning not only through their combinatorial capabilities, but through their social history as well. Signs formed from the twenty-six symbols of the English alphabet take on a life independent of the sound symbols that compose them. They acquire a psychological status in that they are taken as the embodiment of the very word itself, and a social status, in that any deviations from the conventional representation of the sign is interpreted as non-standard regardless of all linguistic facts.

As an example, consider the word 'was,' commonly represented in "eye dialect"[9] renderings as "wuz."[10] This spelling points to a pronunciation of 'was' that includes a short, central vowel like the vowel in 'cup' and a voiced, final consonant, like the 'z' in 'zoo,' a pronunciation wherein 'was' rhymes with 'buzz' – precisely the pronunciation this word does have in most standard spoken varieties throughout the English-speaking world. Ironically, then, readers who encounter the written form "wuz," a phonetically more accurate representation of the standard spoken form, "hear" the voice of a speaker in some sort of social, regional or ontogenetic opposition to standard English. 'Wuz' marks the character as commanding either a mature, non-standard dialect, or, in the case of a child or non-native speaker, an approximation of standard. When they encounter "was," on the other hand, a spelling suggestive of a pronunciation that should rhyme with 'loss' or perhaps 'gas' – pronunciations found in no standard varieties – they "hear" the voice of the standard speaker. In effect, "wuz," a phonetically accurate representation of standard speech, has led to a non-standard voice while "was," the conventional but phonetically inaccurate

9 Discussions of eye dialect usually emphasize its use in denigrating speakers. See, for example, Preston, D.R., The Li'l Abner Syndrome: Written Representations of Speech. (*American Speech, 60*, 328) or Pinker, S., *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language*. (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1994) 387. But denigration is not necessarily the result of its use in literature.

10 To distinguish words from their graphic representation in written English, single quotes will be used for words and double quotes for written forms of words. Thus 'was' refers to the singular past tense form of 'be,' while "was" refers to some instance of that word as it has been standardized in writing.

representation, results in a standard voice.

The psychological and social status attached to standard orthography can obscure not only the relationship between written representations and the spoken word, but also between written representations and syntactic structures. In perhaps all dialects of English, for example, there are two grammatically, semantically and phonologically distinct 'going to' constructions. Yet, because standard written English represents them the same, as "going to," most literate speakers of the language are unaware that there are two. Consider the following two sentences written to reflect casual, but standard, pronunciations of "going to":

1 *I'm* gun'na *buy a new car.*
2 *I'm* goin'da *Kansas City this weekend.*

Though it may at first seem that the difference between the two 'going to' renderings in the above reflects some social, regional or at best phonetically conditioned variation, that is not so; there is a robust grammatical distinction. In sentence 1, the upright sequence might be described as a periphrastic modal verb with the meaning of intentionality and somewhat synonymous with 'will,'[11] and 'buy,' which follows it, as the main verb. In sentence 2, on the other hand, the upright sequence includes the main verb and a phonetically assimilated form of the preposition governing 'Kansas City.' The meaning of the 'going to' in sentence 2 is roughly "to travel." Note too that the two forms are not interchangeable. For example, if one tries to "read" sentence 2 with the 'going to' form from sentence 1, the result is nonsense:

2' *I'm gun'na Kansas City this weekend.*

One cannot read "gun'na" in sentence 2' without getting the intentional modal interpretation and so attempts to interpret 'Kansas City' as a main verb. However, since there is no verb 'Kansas City' in the lexicon of speakers of the language, the sentence is uninterpretable.

Likewise, if one tries to "read" sentence 1 with the 'go-

11 Greenbaum, S., Leech, G., & Svartvik, J. 1972. *A Grammar of Contemporary English.* Burnt Mill: Longman, 87–88.

ing to' form from sentence 2, the intentional interpretation is difficult to realize:

1' *I'm goin'da buy a new car.*

Sentence 1' is most easily interpreted with the main verb meaning of 'going to.' We understand something like, "I'm going in order to buy a new car." Hence, the 'goin'da' form of spoken English is interpreted as a main verb of motion while the 'gun'na' form can only be interpreted as an intentional auxiliary. In effect, speakers of English, both dialect and standard, make a formal distinction between intentional modal 'go' and main verb 'go' in speaking that is obscured by the standard orthography,[12] and, as the following example will show, any attempt to represent this distinction orthographically will of necessity result in a non-standard, dialect rendering.

In Faulkner's *The Bear,*[13] the four chapters which take place in the hunting camp contain seventeen examples of 'going to' used as the intentional modal or as a main verb. Though Faulkner was sometimes inconsistent in his dialect renderings and admits that he let "the moment, the character, the rhythm of the speech, compel its own dialect,"[14] he consistently distinguishes three different dialects in *The Bear*: town white, country white and black. His rendering of 'going to' is an important part of how he distinguishes between the black dialect on the one hand, and the white dialects on the other. Among the white characters of both socio-economic groups, there are ten instances of 'going to,' five intentional and five as a main verb. All are rendered simply as "going to," there being no difference in the renderings of rural and town whites. In rendering the speech of the black characters, however, Faulkner makes a careful distinction. Of the seven 'going to' renderings found in the speech of the black characters, only two are rendered as "going to," and both of these are the intentional modal negated by a preceding "ain't." The four affirmative intentional modal renderings, found in the speech of both Ash and Sam, the two black characters, are written "gonter," as when Sam, explaining that he is

12 Geoffrey Pullum examined a corpus of 40 million words from the *Wall Street Journal* and found ninety-seven instances of 'gonna,' all of which were intentional and immediately followed by a verb. He concludes, "'gonna'... is not casual, but fully conventional, as shown by the fact that it is never casually substituted for occurrences of 'going to' in which 'go' is a verb of motion. Pullum, G. 1997. The Morpholexical Nature of English 'to'- Contraction. *Language, 73*: 1, 87 n.

13 Faulkner, W. 1961. *Three Famous Short Novels.* New York: Vintage Books.

14 Faulkner is quoted in Ross, S.N. 1989. *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice: Speech and Writing in Faulkner.* Athens, GA: University of Georgia, 101.

referring to the dog, Lion, that is going to help them kill the bear says, "That's *gonter* hold Old Ben."[15] The one main verb use of 'going to' made by a black character comes near the end of the story when Ash reports on the activities of one of the other characters, Boon: "Said he *gwine* up to the Gum Tree."[16]

15 Faulkner, *Three Famous Short Novels*, 210.

16 Faulkner, *Three Famous Short Novels*, 308.

Again, the effect of this dialect rendering is ironic, in fact, doubly so. First of all, by indicating a grammatical distinction that is common to perhaps all dialects of English, Faulkner evokes one particular dialect. Secondly, by utilizing a representation that is more accurate, at least in this instance, than standard written English in that it does not obfuscate a prominent grammatical distinction, he emphasizes the marginalized status of his black characters. Readers encountering "gonter" and "gwine" see not linguistic accuracy, but as Faulkner intended, exotica, far removed from the conventional, the standard or the mainstream. They do not nod their heads in admiration of Sam and Ash's verbal and syntactic acuity; rather, they hear the speech of uneducated, socially stigmatized former slaves.

Dialect as an indexical sign

To explain the ironic semiotic effects of written forms such as "wuz," "gonter" and "gwine," it is necessary to see how the primary communicative potential of written dialect is not symbolic, but indexical.[17] First, languages are primarily symbol systems. Speakers of a language must agree that a particular sequence of sounds will have a given meaning. Thus, for example, the sequence d-o-g is conventionalized to mean 'canine' by speakers of English, but there is no intrinsic connection between those three segments and canines. In Peircean terms, the word 'dog' "refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of a law."[18] The same is true of the standard written form of a word. In the sentence, "I'm *going to* buy a new car," the reader understands the highlighted phrase and hence the entire sentence due to the conventions of written English

17 Lyons, J. 1977. *Semantics: Volume I.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 107.

18 Peirce, C.S. 1965. *The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce: Volumes 1 & 2.* Hartshorne C. and Weiss P., editors. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 143.

(Peirce's "law") which state that the graphic representation "going to" in a syntactic context like the one above denotes the intentional periphrastic modal.

When written in a non-standard form, on the other hand, a word takes on an additional indexical meaning. It becomes a type of sign which, according to Pierce, "refers to the object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that object."[19] Thus, in sentence 1 above, the highlighted phrase "gun'na" is not only a symbolic denotation of the intentional periphrastic modal, but in addition, it is an indexical denotation of the purported speaker of the phrase. Since readers of standard English must assume the laws of the language which state that "going to" is the standard, graphic form of the intentional modal, the marked form "gun'na" must be seen as one that has been "affected" by its object, the speaker. The form "gun'na" thus connects to the speaker and describes him just as much as any other detail of physical description or personal history that the writer might ascribe to the character or narrator.

19 Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 143.

Note too that the indexical meaning does not depend upon readers' familiarity with the dialect depicted nearly as much as it depends upon their knowledge of standard written English. Just as Saussure has pointed out that words acquire meaning through the oppositional relationships they have with other words in the language,[20] so too do dialect renderings owe their indexical potential to the oppositional relationship they have with the standard written form of the language. In regard to "gun'na," if readers and writers did not already agree that "going to" was the standard graphic representation, "gun'na" would have no indexical meaning whatsoever, especially since, as pointed out above, the 'gun'na/goin'da' distinction is already formally present in the speech of virtually all native speakers of the language. Without the conventions of standard written English literacy, the graphic form "gun'na" would be indexically transparent.[21]

20 De Saussure, F. 1981. *Cours de Linguistique Générale*. Paris: Payot. 160.

21 Standard written English is perhaps never completely without indexical meaning. By default, characters whose speech is rendered in standard English indicate their status relative to other characters whose speech is rendered as dialect. That must be Faulkner's intention in *The Bear* when he renders the speech of town whites such as General Compson and Major De Spain mostly in standard English while country white and black speech requires many orthographic deviations.

Another example of how reader familiarity with particular non-standard dialects is of little importance in

dialect renderings can be seen in written representations of words containing post-vocalic 'r.' In many dialects both standard and non-standard, 'r' after a vowel in words such as 'car,' 'poor' or 'heart' is not pronounced, though, depending upon the particular dialect, the preceding vowel may be lengthened or mutated in some way. In spite of this variation, writers may still utilize r-lessness in the creation of dialect voices, and their creations maintain the intended indexical effect regardless of where they are read. As noted by Ross, Faulkner often spelled the word 'poor' as "po" to be indexical of an uneducated, black character and as "poor" when he wished to indicate a character with more education or of higher social status.[22] No one would suppose that Faulkner's indexical meaning would be less effective in areas where r-lessness is the standard, such as in London or Mississippi, than it would be in areas where r-fulness is the standard, such as the northern two-thirds of North America. Regardless of how they actually pronounce 'poor,' readers of Faulkner will hear a standard voice when they see "poor" and a non-standard one when they see "po."

22 Ross, *Fiction's Inexhaustible Voice*, 42.

Effective and ineffective dialect renderings

So far, we have seen that without readers' acceptance of the "laws" of standard written English, the indexical impact of dialect forms would not exist. Readers encounter non-standard forms in a text and, in Peirce's terms, "they direct the attention (of readers) to their objects (the characters or narrators) by blind compulsion."[23] Because they mark the character as non-standard in at least a verbal, if not geographical, social or racial sense, it might seem that all dialect renderings are necessarily denigrating. But there are ways writers avoid this. Writers who create versatile dialect voices do make indexical connections to the reader's pre-existing notions of what is and is not standard, but the primary connection they have their readers make is between the rendering and the individual character or narrator to whom the rendering is ascribed.

23 Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 172

Peirce's semiotic theory provides a mechanism for explaining how this is done. Though an indexical sign must connect to some "object," in his terminology, it need not connect to a concept, a "known existing thing... quality, relation, or fact."[24] Indexical signs may just as easily "refer to individuals," that is to say, to the particular character or narrator in the text, not to a type. Unlike conventional symbols which become meaningful through "intellectual operations" and must therefore make connections between script and the sign already lodged in the mind of the reader, indexical signs are associated with an object "by contiguity."[25] In an effective dialect rendering, therefore, the reader bypasses those mental categories concerning types of people and ways of speaking and instead reads the dialect as an index of a single individual. The dialect indices help frame the individual voice, but do not necessarily attach the connotations that are included in the categories of the reader's lexicon.

24 Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 138.

25 Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 172.

What follows are examples of first an ineffective dialect rendering and then an effective one. The first is a linguistically detailed one in which the indices connect to pre-established categories and the result is a limited voice. The second is a linguistically spare rendering that produces an independent, formidable voice. A comparison will reveal how the indexical impact of dialect renderings reaffirms readers' prejudices and doubts in the one case and controverts them in the other.

The first is an excerpt from the poem "Ol' Doc' Hyar" by James Edwin Campbell, a black poet of the late nineteenth century.

> *Ur ol' Hyar lib in ur house on de hill,*
> *He hunner yurs ol' an' nebber wuz ill,*
> *an' he laigs so spry dat he dawnce ur jeeg;*
> *He lib so long dat he know ebbry tings*
> *'Bout de beas'ses dat walks an' de bu'ds dat sings.*[26]

26 This portion of the poem is found in a book by Karla Holloway. (1995. *Codes of Conduct: Race, Ethics, and the Color of Our Character.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 116.)

Campbell consistently represents features of Black Vernacular English that accord well with linguistic descriptions such as those of Fasold and Wolfram[27] and

27 Fasold, R.W. and Wolfram, W. 1973. Some Linguistic Features of Negro Dialect. In DeStefano, J.S., editor. *Language, Society, and Education: A Profile of Black English.* Worthington, OH: Charles A. Jones, 116–148.

Smitherman.[28] The pronunciation of the standard English sounds represented by 'th' as [d] and [t], for example, is indicated in his rendering with the spelling "de" for the definite article 'the' in lines one and five and the relative pronoun 'that' in lines three, four and five. The 'thing' of standard 'everything' is represented as "tings" in line four. He also represents consonant cluster simplification, a rule-governed process of black English, in his rendering of several words that contain clusters of two or more consonants within or at the end of a word. An example of this is 'beas'ses' in line five. The attachment of the plural 's' to 'beast' creates a word that ends in three consonant sounds: [sts]. A phonetically conditioned rule of many black English dialects breaks up such clusters.[29] In this case, the [t] is deleted and a short, epenthetic vowel placed between the two remaining [s] consonants, making a two-syllable word. Campbell also accurately represents morphological and syntactic characteristics of Black Vernacular English; namely, the undifferentiated pronoun use of 'he' in line three, the deletion of copular 'be' in line two[30] and the hypercorrection of the 's' on 'walks' and 'sings' in line five.[31]

In addition to these features distinctive of Black Vernacular English, Campbell also represents several features that though attested in Black dialects are not necessarily unique to them. This is particularly true of pronunciation features. For example, in line two, Campbell represents the long, tense vowel in the words 'leg' and 'jig' instead of the short, lax vowel of standard English varieties through the spellings "laige" and "jeeg" respectively. These are pronunciations found in many Southern, white dialects. Another example is his spelling of 'birds' as "bu'ds," to indicate loss of post-vocalic 'r,' a pronunciation feature common to many dialects in the United States and standard in England. Finally, Campbell has chosen to represent many aspects of speech common to all varieties of English both standard and non-standard. In line two, for example, he utilizes the eye dialect form "wuz" discussed earlier. In lines two, three

28 Smitherman, G. 1985. It Bees Dat Way Sometime: Sounds and Structure of Present-day Black English. In Clark, V.P., Eschholz, P.A., & Rosa, A.F., editors. Language: *Introductory Readings*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 552–566.

29 Fasold and Wolfram, Some Linguistic Features, 120.

30 Labov, W. 1972. *Language in the Inner City*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 67.

31 Fasold and Wolfram, Some Linguistic Features, 133.

and four he utilizes an "allegro form," a representation that indicates a consonant or vowel elision that occurs in speech as words are combined into phrases.[32] In this case, "an'" used to render 'and' in lines two, three and five, indicates the omission of 'd,' an omission common in the speech of all but the most self-conscious speakers of English.

32 Preston, The Li'l Abner Syndrome, 325

Except for the eye dialect, there is a lot to recommend this piece from the standpoint of linguistic accuracy, but as is evident when one first tries to read it, as literature, it is not very effective. Since the rendering is difficult to process, the resulting voice sounds inarticulate, even inscrutable. Any prejudices or doubts about the intellectual or verbal capabilities of poor, uneducated African-Americans that readers bring to the reading are affirmed. The "object" that the reader's mind is connected to is not an individual person, Ol' Doc Hyar, with a real story and a unique point of view, but a type composed of all the prejudices and opinions readers are already likely to hold about non-standard speakers. The representation becomes an example of what North would say African-American modernist literature of the 1920s had to "fight its way out of," or what TuSmith would refer to as "institutionalized" and "formulaic." Both would agree with Holloway, in whose book a part of this poem appears, that this rendering "giv[es] life to stereotypes" and is "intellectually diminishing."[33] Thus, though Campbell has created a rendering that is arguably accurate – in fact, laborious in linguistic detail – readers of his poem hear only a one-dimensional, minstrel-show black voice, one that can convey some of the humor of the African-American experience but not much else.

33 Holloway, *Codes of Conduct*, 115.

In contrast, Reginald McKnight, in his story "Roscoe in Hell," renders the speech of the narrator and protagonist Roscoe in such a way that though the character is placed within a social and racial context, he never becomes a caricature. In this excerpt, Roscoe describes being introduced to the occupants of hell:

They clapping so hard I can feel the vibrations in my chest. Seem like they never gonna stop. Melvin just standing up on the desk with me, clapping his ass off, puffing on his stogie, and making so much of that blue smoke, I almost can't see him. Then the two big dudes grab me and carry me on they shoulders around the room, so's I can shake folks' hands.[34]

34 McKnight, R. 1992. Roscoe in Hell. *The Kind of Light that Shines on Texas*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 68.

McKnight's rendering of African-American speech is effective in both ways that Campbell's is not. First of all, by emphasizing syntactic and morphological indices of Black Vernacular English instead of phonetic and phonological ones as Campbell does, the rendering is easy to read. Of the seventy words, only two are non-standard spellings, namely, "gonna" and "so's," and both of these representations evoke oral forms common to many dialects, ones which readers are likely to have encountered both orally and in writing. This contrasts markedly with Campbell's rendering in which twenty-eight – more than half of the forty-seven word representations – deviate from the standard dictionary entry. Some of Campbell's spellings, such as "dat" for 'that,' "de" for 'the,' and "an'" for 'and,' probably do not interfere with reader's processing of the text. These determiners and the conjunction are function words carrying grammatical meaning only. There are relatively few in the language and they are encountered frequently in just a few lines of text; hence, they can quickly become familiar. But Campbell's non-standard spellings of content words and phrases severely hinder fluent reading. Spellings such as "lib" for 'live,' "hunner yurs" for 'a hundred years,' and "ebbry tings" for 'everything,' are not automatically recognized and the reader must consciously analyze the string in order to retrieve lexical meaning. Moreover, content words, (nouns, adjectives, verbs) are more numerous than function words and many will appear in a text infrequently or only once. Consequently, most of them will not become familiar and reading of the text remains a labor.

The representation of morphological and syntactic features, on the other hand, inhibits processing only slightly,

and these are the types of indices that McKnight relies on to indicate the African-American background of his Roscoe. Like Campbell, he indicates the copula deletion characteristic of Black Vernacular English. In lines one and three, for example, there is no auxiliary "is" to accompany the present participles "clapping" and "standing." Also like Campbell, he includes non-standard agreement patterns and undifferentiated pronoun usage. There is no third-person agreement morphology on "seem" in line two, and "they" is used in a possessive context in line seven. But unlike Campbell, McKnight's grammatical indices are not obscured beneath a tangle of phonetic detail. Since readers automatically recognize McKnight's standardly written words, they can construct a meaningful string and a syntactic representation regardless of the missing "is" or third person 's' verb ending. Readers note the syntactic difference between standard written English and Roscoe's voice, and this difference places Roscoe where McKnight intends, but it does not inhibit the readers' understanding of Roscoe's convincing and articulate voice.

Besides being easy to read, what one notices about Roscoe's speech is that though it is non-standard, McKnight's accurate but linguistically sparse dialect "indices," in the words of Peirce, "assert nothing."[35] They utilize the readers' existent knowledge of standard written English and the belief that standard written English corresponds to a standard voice to place Roscoe in opposition to the standard. Then, drawing on whatever knowledge, first hand or otherwise, of black dialects readers may have, McKnight's well-chosen indices direct readers to construct a specifically African-American voice in their heads. The indices connect Roscoe to a place within the social context, but his voice remains that of an individual. To the degree that readers learn and gain insight, to the degree that they come away impressed with the story told by this particular, non-standard, African-American voice, old assumptions about race, level of education and the intellect behind a dialect voice are controverted.

35 Peirce, *The Collected Papers*, 165.

Marked features and the representation of '-ing'

Though we have seen that a prominent difference between the restrictive dialect rendering of Campbell and the more versatile one of McKnight concerns the sheer number of phonetic features represented, an equally important difference is to be found in which spoken features writers choose to represent. Writers who create versatile dialect voices must also take into account the differing sociolinguistic weight or markedness of the few features they do choose to include. As an example, consider the representation of '-ing,' the unstressed final syllable of present participles and indefinite pronouns such as 'nothing' and 'something.' Though the pronunciation with [In] (rhymes with 'sin') is a variant in the speech of all speakers of English,[36] it is the pronunciation with the velar nasal [In] (rhymes with 'sing') that has come to be associated with standard speech. Studies in Great Britain by Trudgill[37] and in the United States by Labov and Cohen[38] show that speakers from a wide variety of social and ethnic groups consider the [In] pronunciation a low-prestige, non-standard phonetic realization of '-ing.' In fact, so prominent is the sociolinguistic markedness of this feature that, according to Fasold and Wolfram, representation of the 'in' pronunciation is "one of the most stereotyped phonological features of nonstandard speech in the American language."[39] It is perhaps in awareness of the extremely marked status of the 'in' pronunciation that McKnight, in the excerpt above, renders none of the five '-ing' word endings with an "in" spelling.

Other contemporary writers are equally aware of the stigmatizing potential of the '-in' spelling. *In I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings,* for example, Maya Angelou utilizes the '-in' spelling in renderings of no one's speech. This is despite the fact that she represents a wide variety of socially distinct characters: blacks, whites, field hands, ministers. Even in the example below, a rendering of the speech of black field hands, a class with arguably the least education and social status of any in the book, she does

36 Wald, B. and Shopen, T. 1985. A Researcher's Guide to the Sociolinguistic Variable (ING). In Clark, 516.

37 Trudgill, P. 1985. *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society.* Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 47

38 Labov, W. and Cohen, P. 1973. Systematic Relations of Standard and Non-standard Rules in the Grammars of Negro Speakers. In DeStefano, 150.

39 Fasold and Wolfram, Some Linguistic Features, 126

not represent present participles with 'in.' This is in spite of the fact that, like McKnight, she represents elision of sounds with "gonna" and deletes the auxiliary verb in "you (are) standing still":

> *I'm gonna work so fast today I'm gonna make you look like you standing still.*[40]

40 Angelou, M. 1969. *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.* New York: Bantam, 6.

Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

So far, it appears that powerful narrative voices emerge from renderings that are indexical of particular dialects, but that differ only minimally from standard orthographic conventions. Writers such as McKnight and Angelou who rely primarily upon syntactic and morphological indices rather than phonetic ones create dialect texts that are easily accessed. Moreover, it appears that when writers do deviate from standard conventions, they avoid representing dialect features that are the most socially stigmatized. With this in mind, let's consider Twain's rendering of Jim's speech in *Huckleberry Finn*.

Twain uses the marked socio-linguistic meaning of the [In] pronunciation to depict Jim's extreme, marginalized status relative to Huck. Though certainly both black slaves and poor whites in nineteenth-century Missouri commonly used the [In] pronunciation, it is only in Jim's speech that Twain consistently uses the corresponding '-in' representation. Consider this exchange between Huck and Jim when Huck decides to play a trick on Jim:

> Huck *What's the matter with you, Jim?*
> *You been a-drinking?*
> Jim *Drinkin'? Has I ben a-drinkin'?*
> *Has I had a chance to be a-drinkin'?*[41]

41 Twain, M. 1983. *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn.* New York: Penguin, 87.

It is unlikely that any poor white youth such as Huck engaged in casual conversation with a black slave would utilize the [In] pronunciation indicated by the "-ing" spelling in "a-drinking." This rendering seems especially peculiar given the non-standard prefix 'a-' that both Huck and Jim attach to the present participle and signals that both

use non-standard forms. Nonetheless, Twain chooses to represent Jim's speech with "-in'" and Huck's with "-ing" as a part of his overall intent to build a graphic representation of Jim's speech that will make it seem more distant from standard than that of Huck's. In choosing to represent a pronunciation feature closely associated in the minds of readers with low social status in Jim's speech but not in Huck's, Twain matches the respective social distances of the two main characters from middle-class, white society with what readers believe to be respective linguistic distances.

Twain indicates Jim's linguistic distance from the standard not just in his choice of features to represent, but also in the overall, graphic representation; like Campbell's, Twain's dialect rendering differs markedly from the standard orthography. As anyone who has read *Huck Finn* or who has taught it to college freshmen can attest, it is the dialect rendering of Jim that is the most difficult to read. Below is an excerpt in which Jim proves to Huck that he knows what a harem is:

> *A harem's a bo'd'n-house, I reck'n. Mos' likely dey has rackety times in de nussery. En I reck'n de wives quarrels considable; en dat 'crease de racket. Yit dey say Sollermun de wises' man dat ever liv.'*[42]

42 Twain, *Huckleberry Finn*, 81.

When twenty-four of the thirty-seven words in this passage deviate from standard spelling conventions, readers of this passage must work to follow it, and are, therefore, constantly reminded of Jim's difference from them.

Conclusion

Perhaps this is at the heart of TuSmith's and North's objections to dialect renderings such as those of Twain and Faulkner. In choosing to give voice to Jim, Ash and Sam through renderings that are linguistically vivid and therefore graphically anomalous, these two white, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century writers have created black voices that readers of standard English can never

completely assimilate. The high frequency occurrence of non-standard spellings and non-existent or unexpected suffixes commit readers to closely follow the way in which the characters speak so that readers are always aware of the linguistic distance between themselves and the characters. However, it is not that these renderings are "formulaic" or "stereotypical;" the voices of Sam, Ash and Jim, are of authentic individuals. But in their efforts to portray characters from a stigmatized, excluded social class, Faulkner and Twain have created voices that are ultimately impenetrable. Whereas McKnight's Roscoe communicates in an idiom that readers can enter into, the voice of Twain's Jim can never be completely embraced, for readers never feel that Jim is speaking to them in a common, shared tongue. His linguistic separateness matches his social separateness. The difference in the accessibility of Roscoe and Jim, therefore, is not due to differences in the linguistic accuracy of the renderings or differences in the "multilingual" versatility of the readers. It has to do instead with differences in the way the respective authors, McKnight and Twain, regard the extent and mutability of their characters' social marginality.

A brooding archaeology,
the city boys
shall Rock & Roll down South
from New York City: la, la, la, la, la, la.
The universe shall completely disappear.
(an explosion, perhaps, at city-center?)
It will be a long night under no stars.
And there is no further clarification.

Architecture, the New Wave, stay away
from windows.
After work and play it will be 1999.
That is the end of "things" as we know them.
You'll see it on the cover of *Rolling Stone*.
These ideas are not mine, for I have
drawn upon a Higher Power.

Please make the distinction:

meanings,
created from nothing,
the word, spoken,
the existence
of things
just because.

And
the dynamics of abstract art never change,
pretty little pictures kept in your head.
Working on the Highway to Heaven.
You must be willing, of course,
and,
of necessity,
look straight ahead.

Cloth-Bound Reverie

Michael Golec

"Cloth-Bound Reverie" constructs scenes of interaction between subjects (readers, collectors, writers) and books. Privately or publicly collected, books are objects with rich and diverse histories. From art to science to history to literature to romance, books yield an array of topics. But what is the object of the book? What is this bound gathering of paper besides a textual information receptacle?

This essay answers this question by proposing that a subject's interaction (reading, collecting, writing) with a book is an occasion for signification. As such, the book is considered as both artifact and index; its existence signals manifold meanings beyond the text contained within. From its conception, to its design, to its reproduction, the book is a material presence. And yet it causes immaterial experiences such as recollection, inspiration and knowledge, to name but a few. Despite our digital age, the concrete object, the book, will endure precisely because of this dialectic of material and immaterial.

Michael Golec received his M.A. in art history from the University of Illinois, Chicago. He is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in art history, with an emphasis on theory and interpretation, at Northwestern University. He lives and works in Chicago.

Northwestern University
Evanston, IL 60101
m-golec@nwu.edu

Visible Language 32.1
Golec, 78–92

Visible Language, 1998
Rhode Island School
of Design
Providence, RI 02903

Perhaps my old age and fearfulness deceive me, but I suspect that the human species – the unique species – is about to be extinguished, but the library will endure: illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, secret.[1]

Jorge Luis Borges, "The Library of Babel"

Recently, I moved into a new apartment. This space is at odds with itself. Turning a corner, rolling out of bed, opening the front door, I realize that my apartment is all out of whack. Literally, it is twisted. The building leans so that each wall, the floor, and the ceiling are neither parallel nor perpendicular. There are no level planes. Yet, for all its structural faults, this apartment contains the only item I require for comfortable habitation – built-in bookshelves. In all my years of apartment living I have only just acquired such a prize. Everyday, as I enter through the door, just off to the left, I am confronted by my library. Modest as it is, I look forward to my book collection's presence. Each volume, either resting horizontally and stacked, or vertically in a row and at attention, is always there. If anything, my library is reliable.

Durability is the library's greatest strength. Personal or institutional, the library beckons those who are not only readers, but who desire the tactility of the book. Stacks of books invite perusal, dusty volumes seem to drop easily into the hand, and pages turn without resistance. Taking pleasure in the book's objectness directly results from these features. While searching through my own collection, I came upon Borges's story of the most mysterious of libraries. I pulled *Labyrinths* from a shelf quite by chance. Paging through it, I found "The Library of Babel." Not knowing how to approach such a topic – this cloth-bound reverie – until I sat down and read Borges' marvel: this text set me on my course.

Despite the current market – saturated with text on CD-ROM, and the Internet inundated with web sites that allow a reader to download *The Collected Poems of Emily*

1 Borges, J.L. 1964. The Library of Babel. In *Labyrinths: Selected Stories and Other Writings.* New York: New Directions, 58.

Dickinson and Herman Melville's "Bartleby the Scrivener," to name but two of the literary classics available on-line – I am still drawn to the cloth-bound wonder. Paperback, hardcover, dust-jacket, oversized, undersized, alone and amassed, the book deserves yet another testament, another word of praise. Bearing witness to its extraordinary presence (a task that requires the negotiation of immaterial thought and material casing), this essay endeavors to affirm the book. My cloth-bound reverie rejoices in the concrete and abstract. To consider the book in light of this dichotomy serves only to underline its vigor.

Yet, the book's manifold qualities are difficult to discuss in an objective manner. Its striking ability to engage lies within a personal relation between each volume and its reader and/or collector. Only then is the most dazzling array of attributes brought to light. Qualities abound, thus the book exceeds its supposed status as a mere textual information receptacle: typographic composition, illustration and/or photography, paper and binding add to the book's worth. But these are material qualities. What of the immaterial? What of recollection, inspiration, and companionship? The importance of these traits are equal to the primacy of information. However, a reader should not confuse the book's reverential value with its economic value (the materials add up to a certain expense, while the immaterial adds up to ontology – being as such). To this end the book may be considered as an object inscribed twofold. First, there is the typography, the printing of the text; and second, there is the imprint of meaning. Each page receives the former, and the author imparts the latter (meaning materializing in writing and reading). The second inscription also serves as an index of memory – a book engages what the reader retains, a mnemic-trace – allowing the reader access to past experiences.

Imparting information, the book is unlimited in its scope. This essay on the other hand is of limited means. As such it does not profess to speak of the book, rather it speaks for the book. As it stands alone the book is silent, yet its ability to communicate is well known. The reader

comes to the book with a range of experiences and these intermingle with the book's contents. Once read the book then becomes one of many experiences. Through remembrance of purchases, bookstores and clerks, gifts, libraries and librarians, books that accompanied a reader on trips, and others that have been lost, the book thus has its place in a reader's life.

The book's double imprint and indexical nature suggests that it informs not only through text, but through an auratic signal that is made manifest by the book's objectness. This essay acts as a translation of said aura. The reader of this work will anticipate, as one might allow any translator, a certain breadth – room for supposition and circumspection. My gathering of a number of voices, providing a chorus of praise, reinforces this essay's assertions. Admittedly, "Cloth-Bound Reverie" is only a refrain, an echo of all that precedes my attempt at homage.

2 Freud, S. 1965. *The Interpretation of Dreams*. New York: Avon Books, 205.

3 Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

Glow Book Glow

When speaking of the auratic nature of the book, I refer to its ability to exude a certain dynamic force, its ability to engage and enfold. And if I take aura to mean breath, as in the Greek derivation, then I think of the book as alive, which in some paradoxical sense it is – alive. Organically static and conceptually potent, the book is a very real presence beyond the information it holds. However mute the standard volume might be, it speaks of brilliant ages, history, science and literature, all bound, yet ever freed through reading.

The psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud's collection of books is an example of a library's impact on its owner. Through the analysis of his "Dream of the Botanical Monograph," Freud recounted his bibliographic obsession.[2] He wrote of his *"favorite hobby,"* a collection developed from a love of "learning out of monographs."[3] Sitting in his study (Vienna or London), Freud found a multitude of inspiring texts. His interest in ancient art and civilizations, and his collection of books pertaining to this subject in particular,

prompted many of his psychoanalytic theories and discoveries.[4] In Freud's case, as well as others, the book gives off a vibe that, especially when collected under the direction of a private or a public library, is profoundly palpable. One feels it.

How can I qualify this feeling? How can I put it into words? It would seem appropriate to call a witness, to conjure a voice that speaks for the agency of the book. In his essay "Unpacking My Library" the philosopher Walter Benjamin wrote of the collector's confrontation and interaction with his prized possessions as he literally unpacks his collection. The philosopher's evocative portrayal of a man, Benjamin himself sitting amongst the "disorder" of his soon to be erected library, enacts a poignant moment of anticipation. Imagine the collector whose "passion borders on the chaotic."[5] And what a passion it was. Through Benjamin's magical essay the reader is privy to the thrill and desire of acquiring an array of titles such as *Der blaue Reiter*, Lyser's *Linas Marchenbuch*, Balzac's *Peau de chagrin* and a rare copy of *Fragmente aus dem Nachless eines jungen Physikers*.

Why collect books, and for what purpose? It is quite clear from Benjamin's text that his was not simply an activity of gathering information. On this point Benjamin was explicit. He did not store volumes away so that they might be accessed, for practical use, at a later date. On the contrary, there was a great deal in his collection that he did not read. His prizes were not obtained solely for some rational end (although many books were used as reference material). Benjamin considered each volume beguiling, as capable of enveloping the collector in a mist of remembrance. Of this particular quality, Benjamin wrote:

Once you have approached the mountains of cases in order to mine the books from them and bring them to the light of day – or, rather, of night – what memories crowd in upon you.[6]

Benjamin's allusion to the back-breaking rigor of mining suggests that as pleasurable as his experience was, it also entailed a certain amount of pain. Benjamin's flood

4 Botting, W. and Davis, J.K. 1989. Freud's Library and an Appendix of Texts Related to Antiquities. In L. Gamwell and R. Wells, editors. *Sigmund Freud and Art: His Personal Collection of Antiquities*. Binghamton, NY: State University of New York, 184–192. See also Robertson, R. 1994. On the Sources of Moses and Monotheism. In Gilman, S.L., et al., editors. *Reading Freud's Reading*. New York: New York University Press, 266–285.

5 Benjamin, W. 1969. Unpacking My Library. In *Illuminations*. New York: Schocken Books, 66.

6 Benjamin, Unpacking My Library, 66.

of recollection, sparked by each volume, included the various cities he had traveled to in order to purchase a particular book, the events that surrounded each purchase, and the persons who were involved. Certain experiences for Benjamin, joyful or otherwise, were aligned with each book; the tactile nature of which evoked a memorable scene.

Many collectors attest to Benjamin's experience.[7] I for one have much the same sensation when confronting my own modest book collection, each volume of which engages me in the most intimate manner. When idle I allow my eyes to peruse the semi-ordered spines. Each title sparks off thoughts, ideas and introspection. Every book is an offering, a tangible object awaiting my touch. And as I reach out, pulling a title from its snug home, the sediment that is my memory stirs like silt in a clear pond, rising as if called forth by some epiphanic master. Thus the release of these fine particles, which can be likened to an explosion of neurological filament, is the very essence of inspiration. The book is not, however, simply an index of knowledge or information, rather the book is also an index of a personal history. As the book assumes an indexical role it undertakes a signifying mode whereby the reader is effected by the book's auratic force. In this instance, the book signals – telegraphs – a message that awakens his or her memory. The mnemic moment is activated, and a reader recalls the circumstances surrounding each volume's purchase and subsequent reading.

Inspiration is traced to the book's warm embers and the rich terrain of color and bulk of the bookshelf. Like Freud, the reader/collector amasses a number of books to jolt the writer into production.[8] But does accumulating data simply spur the writer on? Writers take notes and read relevant texts. They also evaluate other styles of writing. Plunging into other's works maintains the challenge put forth by one's mentors. Revisiting these essential texts sets the writer's pace; gathering information is one thing, but research and writing is a passion that feeds on the eternal stacks inhabiting this world. Does this

7 When discussing Benjamin, one will recall his influential essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." Benjamin's discussion of "aura" should not be confused with my own use of the term. However, one might see a correlation, for Benjamin's and my understanding of the word is predicated on presence (although I put the issue of a singular and unique object aside). See Benjamin, Walter. 1969. The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction. In *Illuminations*, 217–251.

8 In this instance, reader, collector, and writer are embodied in a single subject.

information endure? Indeed, what is gained by reading is transferred to another text (whether written or to be written at some later date), which in turn channels into yet another text, and this continues. But reading is not without resistance. Books often fail to yield to the writer. In that case he or she moves on to yet another, and soon books are piled everywhere. The stack continues growing.

A writer amongst his or her books suffers through stagnant periods followed by a mad dash for the pen, typewriter or word processor. For example, Edgar Allen Poe wrote:

During a rainy afternoon, not long ago, being in a mood too listless for continuous study, I sought relief from ennui in dipping here and there, at random among the volumes of my library – no very large one, certainly, but sufficiently miscellaneous; and, I flatter myself, not a little recherche.[9]

9 Poe, Edgar Allen. 1981. *Marginalia.* Charlottesville, VA: University Press of Virginia. 2.

Poe required very little to light the fire of encouragement. Allowing himself to plunge into his collection, he invigorated his work in a manner that was unique to each volume's physical proximity. Poe's laissez-faire attitude contributed to his receptive nature. That is, the combination of mood and location ignited revelation.

Revelation is not, however, exclusive to the personal library. The public library is, by all reliable accounts, a rich and varied microculture of librarians, writers and researchers (not to mention the array of personalities corresponding to each title). The approach to any public library's entrance entails more than traversing the threshold of an information storage space. The doorway, in and of itself, suggests an opening to a range of experiences. A greeting from a guard followed by pulling the drawers of the card catalog, or sitting at a computer terminal, then the search through the stacks; but this is just the beginning. A visitor to the library can end up in any number of locations – a hushed room where like minded readers congregate at oak tables. Rare books are waiting in the Special Collections department, and scholars flock to this room to read, to research, to look, to touch. Rustling is

heard as gloved hands reverently page through ancient tomes, sift through illuminated manuscripts and study works conceived over centuries.

It is not necessary, if one cares for such an experience, to visit that space of arcane activities. Any public library's shelves offer the smell of musty paper and book-cloth, an array of colored vertical spines, and the chance encounter with an unexpected text. One such moment of discovery, for me, was meeting with the English typographer Eric Gill's *An Essay on Typography.*[10] This delightfully modest book encases Gill's lamentation of the twentieth-century's abnormalities and his pronounced desire for humanity and humility in craft production. The text is letter-pressed onto a greenish-off-white "laid" paper. Deckled edges and ample margins contribute to what Paul Rand explained as the book's import. Rand wrote, "Eric Gill's admirable little book... is important less for its erudition about the theory and practice of typography than for moral support it gives to artists...."[11] This little book rested quietly, first on a shelf, and then in my hand. It exuded a warmth and encouragement beyond the words Gill had written. By *An Essay*'s example, I too might produce this thing that is beautiful, this object "which pleases being seen."[12]

10 Gill, Eric. 1931. *An Essay on Typography.* London: Sheed & Ward.

11 Rand, Paul. 1993. *Design, Form, and Chaos.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 191.

12 Gill, *Essay on Typography,* 11.

With all that the private and public collection has to offer, I must ask: Why would a reader care to be far from Benjamin's warm dusty crates, or from Borges' "incorruptible" and "secret" space? I find it inconceivable a reader can live without books, that he or she finds a digital substitute satisfying. But I am prejudiced and admit that I do not want to know what such an existence would entail.

Beautiful Books

In his later years Borges became blind. How ironic and cruel, a man, whose whole life was books, propelled into darkness. Yet, he did not cease to write, nor did he vacate his position as director of the Argentinian National Library. Borges relied on his tactile instinct ("The blind," said Descartes, "see with their hands"), touching those illumi-

nating packages thereby keeping them and himself alive – alive in books. Borges literally never let go of the object of his desire.

By abandoning the book as an object, a reader loses far more than an inconvenient pile of paper, he or she forfeits a thing of beauty. How is it that a reader might know what is beautiful? Quite simply through reading, he or she interacts with books and decides what qualities satisfy this activity. Because beauty is not a quality of the object per se, but is located in the mind that considers the object, the beautiful book then contains no discernible flaws in production and presentation. It is beautiful because the reader judges the object so. And certainly beauty is the goal of many a printer and designer; that is to engage the reader and collector with the resplendent object. By establishing the Kelmscott Press, the nineteenth-century writer/printer/designer William Morris made this his mission. He wrote, "I began printing books with the hope of producing some which would have a definite claim to beauty...."[13] Indeed, for Morris the defilement of such an object was due to ignorance. Those who could not appreciate the care and craft that went into book design and printing lacked vision. Yes, a book can be less-than-beautiful and still retain the author's eloquence (because an author's idea, narrative and style is not altered), yet Morris only meant to enhance, or at least not distract from, this quality. In his essay "The Ideal Book," Morris wrote:

In fact a book, printed or written, has a tendency to be a beautiful object, and that we of this age should generally produce ugly books, shows, I fear something like malice prepense – a determination to put our eyes in our pockets whenever we can.[14]

Morris lamented the disregard of his era – the industrial revolution – for aesthetic excellence. The book arts since medieval illuminated manuscripts – although considered a minor art form – promoted Morris' particular fascination.

From the fifteenth-century *Nuremburg Chronicle* to my first edition of e.e. cummings' 95, elegance is found in

13 Morris, W. 1993. A Note By William Morris on His Aims in Founding the Kelmscott Press. In C. Wilmer, editor. *News From Nowhere and Other Writings*. London: Penguin Books, 387.

14 Morris, W. 1982. The Ideal Book. *In The Ideal Book: Essays and Lectures on the Arts of the Book*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 67.

materiality. All that is book production – page size, type style and size, leading, margins, paper – contributes to a book's aesthetic character. As Morris lovingly described:

[A] *big folio lies quiet and majestic on the table, waiting kindly till you please to come to it, with its leaves flat and peaceful, giving you no trouble of body, so that your mind is free to enjoy the literature which its beauty enshrines.*[15]

Morris' text evokes the sensual quality of his work – his love. Consider a crisp off-white page pressed with black type; it is inscribed, impregnated. Sheets of paper are filled with words; they pour into folios until the book is complete. From the mind to the pen to the press to the page. The paper's porous surface welcomes literature, history, science, et cetera. However described, from its birth (its *reproduction*), the book is touched by the incessant pressure of the printing press and all that precedes it. And then some.

I am speaking of a kind of skin – a kind of epidermal surface – tattooed with words, with language. The reader caresses, as did Borges, the book's surface. As it is marked so it marks. That is to say, a book is a compilation of impressions, textual and typographic. A volume held, by its front and back cover, opened and exposed, the contents of which pass before (material) and into (immaterial) the reader. It is as if the eyes devour each word, phrase, sentence, and paragraph. These morsels – characters (both typographic and literary), scenes, theories, polemics, manifestoes, et cetera – are held within the reader. As the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty proclaimed, "He is obliged to admit that objects before him pass into him…."[16] The book in its full-blown form (im)presses, and its presence and then absence has a residual effect. Language and the enjoyment of reading linger. The very *object* of the volume – the book – gathers more than dust.

Terms such as *impregnation, reproduction, mark* and *(im)press* are more than metaphors. They allude to a number of dual activities. Yes, the book is literally *impregnated* with ink, which is a result of mechanical *reproduction,* and

15 Morris, The Ideal Book, 73.

16 Merleau-Ponty, M. 1964. Eye and Mind. In *The Primacy of Perception: And Other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, and Philosophy of Art, History and Politics.* Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. 166.

as such it is *mark*ed by an *impression* via the printing press. Impregnated with meaning, which is reproduced in a reader's memory, the book marks and impresses – it transfers and transforms. Every book touches its reader (the book's double imprint and indexical nature) leaving a trace that can then be followed back to the library. Each of these terms allude to a body that sends messages (text), while receiving its share of contact (annotation, inscription, dedication, et cetera).

Reading in the Margins

A residue of sorts can be found in many books in nearly as many libraries. Indelible markings stain the book's surface. Each page receives a series of remarks that are generally referred to as *marginalia* – anything written in the margins, on the flyleaves and endpapers. This manner of annotation is a running commentary, an intervention of sorts, where writing can be bold and original. As far as my collection is concerned, one can find numerous volumes bearing traces of intellectual progression. Open any of my books and there are my penciled-in thoughts. Each note is an inscription, a scratch on the paper's surface – not drawing blood so much as inspiration. Searching through my books, paging through each volume, I am reminded of this critical activity. I can locate each instance of interaction. Here I delved into a text, and there I was amused. This I share with the greatest of writers, Melville and Poe to name but a few. Morris would cringe at marginalia's joyous defacement. Nonetheless, I believe he could be swayed into comprehending this activity, for Morris' notion of the submissive folio beckons my lead to violation.

Indeed, marginalia is my own kind of private and illicit writing whereby I speak – unencumbered and not the least bit self-consciously – to myself and to the author. Once purchased and contained within a collection, the book – *my* book – is for one. In other words – and you will excuse this hackneyed allusion – it is monogamous. I do not lend my books.

Imparting its secrets, the book entices me to offer mine. Each transmission/inscription is held tight within the binding's embrace. No other person is privy to my musings, my comments, my underlinings and my questions. This is where my engagement with the text is most intense.[17] Imagine reading without such a map. After all, a reader must find his or her way back to noteworthy passages, troublesome arguments and useful insights. Like Melville, who "read with a pencil in his hand," I too make marks, inscribe circles, draw arrows, write comments.[18] This is literary intervention, an unraveling of underlying meaning; this is how I get to the writing that is under the writing. My pencil scrapes away the primary sediment, exposing the depth of an author's argument or narrative.

Some literary historians occupy themselves with others' markings. The historian's research remarks on, for instance, Melville's marginalia. He or she searches through the writer's library, transcribing and then publishing, or *re*-marking, every notation. If lucky, the historian locates a real gem of a (re)mark: for example, Melville correcting a printer's error in his copy of *Mosses from an Old Manse* by drawing a line through the word "friend" and writing "serpent" above.[19]

Marginalia provides idiosyncratic commentary, what Poe referred to as "the picturesqueness of… numerous pencil-scratches."[20] Annotation transfers the very personal to the book, which willingly receives these notes. "Pencil-scratches" personalize a library, and marginalia marks each book as the sole property of "me." Therefore, if I possess the book, it must also lay claim to me (as it is marked, so it marks). An interdependence such as this testifies to the auratic agency of the book. As I have stated throughout this essay, it is as if the book, both beautiful and informative, invites notational violation. As it receives any number of markings, the book does so only by way of invitation. The volume must convey some import to its reader, thereby engaging in reciprocating impressions.

18 The poet Susan Howe writes of Melville's intellectual prosthesis – his pencil. See Howe, Susan. 1993. *The Nonconformist's Memorial.* New York: New Directions, 89.

19 Howe, *The Nonconformist's Memorial,* 8. Howe embarked on a series of extensive explorations of American literature and marginalia. See also Howe, S. 1993. *The Birth-mark: Unsettling the Wilderness in American History.* Hanover, NH: University Press of New England.

20 Poe, *Marginalia,* 3.

A Constellation of Signs

A personal collection of books reflects an individual and his or her interests – it is all that is strange and enticing. As an autobiographical construction, a monument of sorts, the personal library is a treasure trove of curious allusion; it is a constellation of signs triggering inquiry and speculation. As such, a reader is subject to a call that invites such scrutiny. For example, upon entering an acquaintance's apartment I immediately embark upon a search: spying chairs, a sofa, a dining-room table, a television – possibly a computer – until finally my eye locates the prize: a bookshelf. Here I divine qualities of this person's character. He has collected a number of artifacts (paintings, photos, amulets and the like), but my interest lies in the ordered spines that signify identity. Imagine, there sitting on one shelf is a row of books, all are bound in the same olive green leather. They are aligned so that the lettering on each spine creates a horizontal gold band that extends across the entire series. Moving closer, I am able to make out the title of each book. They are, in total, the collected works of Goethe. I reach to pull a single volume from its nest, but I am distracted. Over there, two shelves up and to the left, my eye rests on a complete set of the works of Brecht. Below these are several volumes on the Bauhaus, and more on Mies van der Rohe. Certainly not every person is interested in this question of signified identity – in divining a unsuspecting party's interests. And really, it seems pretentious to judge a person by the holdings of his library. Yet, for all of my behavior's presumption, it is a start.

Principally, a reader purchases books varying in significance and signification. Gathered on the shelves of a personal library are books that have been read, books that will be read, and books that will never be read. Texts that were accessed resonate throughout a reader's life, they are stored away in memory and are brought to the fore when necessary. Titles that remain unread, but are slated to be delved into, take on quite another meaning. These

books entice, beckoning a reader to slip them from the shelf and dip into their assets. Finally, there are those volumes that will never disclose their wonders, they remind us of the inconceivable amount of information there is to behold. Thus a reader is forced to grapple with the fact that he or she cannot know it all, let alone read it all.

Each of the above instances describes a relation between a physical object residing in the external world and an internal concept or memory. The advantage of the private bookshelf's topology, by its very nature, is a presentation of its holdings at a glance. A book collection is a kind of archive of memories. Available at a moment's notice, a reader surveys his or her past (and at times, his or her future) by "mining" present possessions.

Conclusion

Is the library, as Borges wrote, "illuminated, solitary, infinite, perfectly motionless, equipped with precious volumes, useless, incorruptible, [and] secret [?]" Indeed, some libraries are "illuminated, solitary," and hold a number of "precious volumes." I hope this essay demonstrates that books – single or collected, private or public – are less than precious (no matter how beautiful), and as such are prone to corruption. Yet, this situation is far from degenerate. The corruptible library is a vital thing: it shrinks and expands, suffers and inspires, gives and takes, and exudes an undeniable force on the collector, researcher, reader and writer. Does this enumeration prove that the library is not what Borges proclaimed? No. The library is all that Borges believed, while it is also the opposite. Books have their uses, however useless those uses may be.

As a collection, the library may be thought of as a dual system held by a single organism. In conclusion, I propose that the library (and each book contained within) is an organ for recollection and production. In terms of the former quality, the library organ functions as a storage unit, completely accessible for knowledge, information and personal history (the public library should not be

excluded when considering books as an index of experience). The latter quality, no less complex, provokes a reader to action. A collection available for research and citation sets one to the task of writing. Thus the library organ of production contributes to its own growth, and the possibility of its infinite nature.

Do I consider my own collection as a library organ of recollection and production? Yes, and each time I step through the door leading into my apartment, I see out of the corner of my eye that durable constellation that is born of my own predilections. Maintaining my library organ is a full-time pursuit. Even when abstaining from its cultivation, I am held by its manifest qualities.

Creative force, up to our ears
in paperwork.
Some folks go out walking.
(Creative genius
interwoven with nature.)
God has planned the fields of Earth accordingly.
From his long experience, he knows,
don't you see?
We have all this land...
We have a few trains left...
We have a few hobos left...
We have a few days left.
There is
a plan for rotation. Cry if you must.
I cannot help you.
We are all Associates of the Master,
here, in the moonlight streaming
in from deserted planets,
here,
in deeply held
convictions
of old men working in the fields,
wanting to hop a fine fast freight
for Omaha and other points East
or West of no hope.

Errol Miller, author of the poems in this issue, has published previously in *Visible Language*, and recently in *American Poetry Review, Rhino, First Intensity, Spillway, Mangrove, Centennial Review, Oyez Review* and *Painted Bride Quarterly.* New collections are *Forever Beyond Us, Blue Atlantis, This Side of Chicago, Downward Glide* and *Bittersweet Blues.* He lives in Louisiana.

PO Box 14693
Monroe, LA 71207

Visible Language 32.1

Rhode Island School
of Design
Providence, RI 02903

Journal Information

Editorial Correspondence

Manuscripts, inquiries about research, and other contributions to the journal should be addressed to the editor. Letters to the editor are welcome. The editor will also relay to the author questions or comments on any article. Your response – and the author's reply – will not be published without your permission and your approval of any editing. If you are interested in submitting an article to the journal and would like a copy of our *Notes on the Preparation of a Manuscript*, please request this information from the editor. Editorial correspondence should be addressed to:

Prof. Sharon Helmer Poggenpohl
Editor, Visible Language
Institute of Design, IIT
350 North LaSalle Street
Chicago, Illinois 60610
Telephone 312/595-4921
Fax 312/595-4902
E-mail idpoggenpohl@id.iit.edu

If you are interested in serving as guest editor for a special issue devoted to your specific research interest, write to the editor, outlining the general ideas you have in mind and listing a half dozen or so topics and possible authors. If you would rather discuss the idea first, call the editor at 312/595-4921.

Business Correspondence

Subscriptions, advertising, and related matters should be addressed to:

Visible Language
Rhode Island School of Design
Graphic Design Department
2 College Street
Providence, Rhode Island 02903
Telephone 401/454-6171

Subscription Rates

United States	*Individual*	*Institutional*
1 year	$35.00	$65.00
2 year	$65.00	$124.00
3 year	$90.00	$183.00
*Foreign**		
1 year	$42.00	$72.00
2 year	$79.00	$138.00
3 year	$111.00	$204.00

Prepayment is required. Make checks payable to *Visible Language* in U.S. currency only.

Foreign banks need a U.S. correspondent bank.

* Foreign subscriptions include additional postage ($7.00 per year).

Back Copies

A limited number of nearly all back numbers is available. A booklet listing the contents of all past journal issues is available on request. Individual reprints are not available.

Advertising

Detailed information about advertising is available on request.

Copyright Information

Authorization to photocopy items for internal or personal use, or for libraries and other users registered with the Copyright Clearance Center (CCC) Transactional Reporting Service, provided that the base fee of $1.00 per article, plus .10 per page is paid directly to:

CCC
21 Congress Street
Salem, Massachusetts 01970
Telephone 508/744-3350
0022-22244/86 $1.00 plus .10

ISSN 0022-2224

Published continuously since 1967.

Index included in last issue of volume year.