

## Book Reviews

*The Digital Word: Text-Based Computing in the Humanities.* Ed. by George P. Landow and Paul Delany. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Pr., 1993. 362p. (ISBN 0-262-12176-X).

The computer-aided analysis of text, an area of the humanities that is by no means new and that has, in fact, seen several decades of activity, is now experiencing a new surge of interest among scholars. The Text Encoding Initiative promises to provide all areas of textual study with thorough and practical guidelines for the electronic encoding of text; scholarly publishers such as Chadwyck-Healey and Oxford University Press have embarked on substantial electronic text publishing projects; prominent scholars in editorial theory have held out great hope for a reconceiving of the "Edition" through electronic texts; and in many places around the United States and Canada we see the introduction and growth of electronic text centers in libraries. At a time when interest in these matters is growing rapidly in both the mainstream of many academic disciplines and in libraries, there is a compelling need for books that bring together a body of thought that touches on a broad spectrum of issues. Rosanne Potter's *Literary Computing and Literary Criticism* (1989) is one such work and serves admirably to bring the researcher or librarian into contact with a variety of literary and computational perspectives.

*The Digital Word*, edited by George Landow and Paul Delany, is a welcome addition, as it likewise speaks to a broad audience about issues and ideas related to the computerization of text. Like Potter's work, it is a collection of essays, many of which have been previously published. That one of the essays is more than six years old emphasizes the con-

tinuum of work and ideas that exists in this area. Still, there are many aspects of *The Digital Word* that are fundamentally unsatisfying.

Delany and Landow set out to show how a broadly conceived sense of textual computing is redefining the "traditional activities of humanities scholars." To that end, they offer essays that illustrate three facets of textual computing: it redefines the form of the traditional text; it produces a text with qualities unique to the electronic format; and it melds aspects of creation, transmission, and analysis. Exploring all of this in a single volume would seem to be a difficult task, and perhaps such ambitiousness is at the root of this work's problems. Reading it, one feels that the editors have not used the space of the book well; the selection of the essays lacks focus, making *The Digital Word* often seem disjointed, lurching from one essay to the next without apparent connection. One is left with an impression of very uneven quality, with a mixture of significant, intellectually challenging essays, functional though ordinary guides, obsolete and sometimes inaccurate assessments of the current state of the technology, and works better left out altogether.

Although this book makes significant contributions to issues of textual analysis, many other areas of text-based computing are barely treated, or treated in such a way that the book is already dated. The editors throw together such diverse computational and analytical areas as Internet-accessible catalogs, document retrieval, text management software, textual analysis, and critical editions, making it difficult to find one's way in a sea of irrelevant noise.

With all of that said, it may come as a surprise that this book is energetically

recommended. *The Digital Word* brings together some of the best thinking about textual analysis and the state of scholarly communication.

- There is probably no better statement on the relevance and conceptual foundations for descriptive markup schemes for textual computing than the essay by James H. Coombs, Allen H. Renear, and Steven J. DeRose. Its republication in this volume is certainly welcome and needed.
- Allen Renear and Geoffrey Bilder make an excellent contribution to current thinking on scholarly communication. Their discussion of both current and future use of the medium goes to the heart of the nature of the digital word in our increasingly networked world, making clear that most frequently the electronic medium is used for something other than scholarship or scholarly communication.
- Peter Robinson's essay on the critical edition will be an important point of reference for the growing number of discussions in this area. His argument brings together many of the ideas articulated in recent editorial theory and computer-aided analysis. The computer promises to offer to the critical edition the flexibility and, through the ways it documents its decisions, the credibility it may have previously lacked.
- Jeremy Clear offers an excellent report on the British National Corpus Project. His detailed description of the most important tool in the history of corpus linguistics will satisfy both the uninitiated and the more knowledgeable.
- Nancy Kaplan and Stuart Moulthrop are not the first scholars to have critiqued Marcia Peoples Halio, who suggests that the composition skills of students may be negatively influenced by their choice of an operating system, but they use their analysis as the foundation of a more interesting argument concerning the relationship between the way we perceive and the way we write.
- Jacques Virbel provides interesting insight into the development of the new

Bibliothèque de France with his description of their scholar's workstation project, a project both visionary and functional. While criticisms of the workstation will abound, it is clear its designers worked with rather than in isolation from researchers in understanding issues of research in an electronic environment.

There is far more that is excellent in *The Digital Word* than there is that is bad. It is a shame, however, to have included those essays that are so disappointing, and that the editors did not use an organizing principle less ambitious and more coherent.—*John Price-Wilkin, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, Virginia.*

**Dordick, Herbert S., and Georgette Wang.** *The Information Society: A Retrospective View.* Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1993. 168p. (ISBN 0-8039-4186-2); paper (ISBN 0-8039-4187-0).

To paraphrase a cliché, inside this slender volume there is a book struggling to emerge. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that this is a book in embryo. Embryo, that is, as Groucho Marx defined it in a letter: "My plans are still in embryo. In case you've never been there, this is a small town on the outskirts of wishful thinking."

The authors set out to examine "to what extent an information society has emerged, and whether the promises of the past 30 or more years have been met." They also aim to explore the consequences of "informatization" on nations either newly industrialized or yet-to-be-industrialized. Both Dordick and Wang are experienced researchers and commentators on the social and cultural aspects of information technology applications. Following a brief review of the premises and assumptions, hopes and expectations expressed by the information society forecasters in the 1970s and 1980s, the authors describe three scales for measuring the informatization of a country. The infrastructure scale is measured by the density of telephone lines, television sets, newspaper circulation and the amount of data terminal equipment on public telephone and telex