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## *Cyberspace Renaissance*

Browsing the university bookstore last year, I was drawn to a new paperback entitled *The Internet Navigator: The Essential Guide to Network Exploration for the Individual Dial-Up User*. Its cover was handsomely decorated with a full-color Latin map of the New World and a noble ship at sail on previously uncharted seas.<sup>1</sup> This was a book I had to possess. I grabbed it off the display shelf, bought it, and took it home as a magical, talismanic link between two seemingly disparate areas of my discipline: the study of new world exploration and the origins of colonialism (about which I knew a little), and the use of that fascinating and terrifying new research tool, the Internet (about which I knew almost nothing). The book's first chapter was titled "A Wild Surmise" and its first subheading, "Destinations You Haven't Thought of." The attraction of the volume for me was that it brought the promise of rebirth and rejuvenation long associated with the idea of new world exploration to a different frontier of discovery.

Those of us who profess Renaissance literature have become uncomfortable of late with many of the connotations of the term *Renaissance* as a label for our area of interest because of its timeworn Burckhardtian association with the glorification of the individual and of political despotisms of various unsavory sorts, its highlighting of intellectual hierarchy at the expense of community. As I argued in an article on the state of the discipline written five years ago for an MLA collection entitled *Redrawing the Boundaries* and edited by Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn, those of us who study the period roughly spanning the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries now often prefer to label it the "early modern era" as a way of distancing ourselves from the hegemonic implications of the older label.<sup>2</sup> But the positive ideas

1. *The Internet Navigator* by Paul Gilster (New York, 1993).

2. "Renaissance/Early Modern Studies," in *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*, ed. Greenblatt and Gunn (New York, 1992), pp. 41-68.

associated with the term *Renaissance* are among the things that drew many of us to our chosen area of expertise in the first place: the promise of transcendence, rebirth, the surpassing of previous limits whether intellectual or territorial. For a variety of reasons, the idea of the Renaissance is a hard one to give up. Hence the attraction of *The Internet Navigator*, which seemed to promise that we could transfer the romance of exploration to a new form of space without conquests, the extermination of indigenous populations, or the violent squandering of native resources.

Computerization has altered most areas of literary studies, not only our own. Nevertheless, those of us who profess "the Renaissance" have a peculiarly strong investment in the changes wrought by computerization because they appear (at least from our present vantage point) to be creating a new, neutral space within which we can re-engage our fascination with ideas of intellectual rebirth and renewal without appearing to condone the originary violence that so often accompanied the new ideas in the historical era of our interest. Indeed, as I shall argue at greater length later on, one of the great transformations wrought or at least made increasingly visible in our discipline with the assimilation of computerized technologies is a generalized abandonment of violence as a focal point for interpretation. As a discipline, we are coming to generate meaning less in terms of agonistic models—confrontation, class warfare, crises of distinction within hierarchical structures—and more in terms of networks—horizontal systems of relationship—in which violence can still be conceptualized but has lost its originary force. The present essay is both extension and critique of my earlier piece in that, while I stand by most of my earlier generalizations, I now perceive the faint outlines of disciplinary changes that may permit a renewal of "Renaissance" ideas I earlier depicted as too fraught with unease to remain part of our critical vocabulary.

## II

Since the present collection of essays, unlike *Redrawing the Boundaries*, is limited to the Renaissance/early modern era, individual contributors are freed to pursue specific areas of methodological change rather than striving for full coverage of our discipline as it exists today. My essay here will concentrate on the impact of computerization and the opening up of cyberspace, a subject that went almost unnoticed by

most contributors to the Greenblatt and Gunn collection. I shall valiantly strive to avoid technological determinism. I am not interested in positing which came first: the computer or the altered mind-set that both enabled the spread of micro-computerization and appears to us as its product. What is important is that we presently find ourselves at an important technological crossroad that we like to define by analogy with a similar set of alterations in the Renaissance/early modern era. It is no accident that the ambitious multi-institutional program to put all written material online calls itself "Project Gutenberg." The discovery, or invention, of cyberspace is only one of the ways in which our own age seems uncannily to replicate Renaissance discovery. Most obvious at present is the concomitant alteration in the ways we perceive textual space.

It is by now commonplace to assert that writing by means of the computer, which allows us to customize and reshape our documents in a variety of ways, is eroding the distinction between manuscript and printed book, thereby giving our own era special access to a Renaissance state of mind in which the distinction had not yet been clearly established. A sense of pride in print craftsmanship is now available to individuals without a complicated financial outlay for the presses and movable typefaces required for Renaissance printing. It is no accident that one of the desktop publishing systems currently available is called *Aldus*, after the celebrated early humanist Aldine Press. One of the interesting features of the early decades of printing is that printers started out by conceptualizing the books they produced as manuscript-replicas. They designed typefaces that resembled the dominant manuscript hands of the period; they hired hand illuminators and rubricators for the most sumptuous of printed volumes; they used *Incipits* rather than title pages. They appear not to have perceived the printed book as a fundamentally different form, but rather as a manuscript book that could be produced with greater speed and convenience than formerly. And indeed, as incunabulists have sometimes cautioned us, we need to conceptualize and catalogue printed books before 1501 as though they were unique manuscripts rather than identical copies.<sup>3</sup> Nor did the public appetite for printed books necessarily equal the rate at which they were produced. It is a melan-

3. See, for example, Paul Henry Saenger, *A Catalogue of the Pre-1500 Western Manuscript Books at the Newberry Library* (Chicago, 1989).

choly fact that many early printers were financially encumbered or even bankrupted by the overzealous production of humanist editions of classical texts for which they were unable to find a market.

We who are approaching the year 2000 have reached a remarkably similar juncture in that we too have initiated a radically new technology for producing and disseminating written materials without fully conceptualizing the textual changes that computerization is likely to bring about. Like printed books in the late fifteenth century, our computer-generated books at present resemble those being produced by earlier print technologies. The conversion of literary and critical texts to hypertext or CD-ROM format is taking place more slowly than might have been expected, and CD-ROM databases like the forthcoming and potentially wonderful *Editions and Adaptations of Shakespeare*,<sup>4</sup> offered at \$4000, are still too expensive for many individual scholars and some libraries, even though such databases typically cost far less to acquire than would hardbound reprints of all the included editions. Just as early printers were slow to conceptualize the printed book as an entity independent of the manuscript, so we have for the most part failed to assimilate the computer-generated text as an entity independent of the printed book, even though computerization has been extant for as long in our century as printing had been in Europe by the year 1500.

It seems clear to many of us, however, that we are presently coming out of an "age of the printed book" that had its inception around 1500 and lasted half a millennium. We do not know what the future of printed books will be, any more than our forebears could predict the destiny of the manuscript, but many of us perceive the printed book as an endangered species. A generation or two ago, scholars took print so much for granted that they may be said to have thought and written through the medium of print rather than about it. Now, we are far more self-conscious about technologies of writing. As part of an international movement to investigate the history of the book, Renaissance scholars are taking strong new interest in the formal features of the printed book as it developed during our period, and in the ways in which print culture mirrored and redefined the broader culture of which it was a part. Within the past two or three years alone, Evelyn Tribble has published an analysis of the margin-

4. Edited by Anne Barton and John Kerrigan (Cambridge, Eng., 1995).

alia of English Renaissance books, showing how glosses and other seemingly peripheral material could help to define the audience for a given printed text; Kevin Dunn has produced a study of the Renaissance preface, which is almost always omitted from twentieth-century editions even though it is an important key to intentionality and projected reception of the text it introduces to the reader; Tessa Watt has published a remarkable account of cheap popular English books of the period; and Roger Chartier's *L'ordre du livre*, with its reformulation of the meaning of early modern authorship, has appeared in English translation.<sup>5</sup> In my own department, a number of graduate students have developed strong interest in the history of the Renaissance book and the same thing is happening at other graduate schools around the country and, indeed, around the world. It is particularly interesting that, in the United States at least, the new work in the history of the Renaissance book is being produced primarily by young, emerging scholars. They are the ones for whom the computer is most naturalized as a technology for writing, for whom the printed book is least taken for granted as an object.

Earlier in our century, the dominant scholarly attitude toward English Renaissance printed materials was polite (or not so polite) disparagement. Early printed editions of the canonical literature were regarded as crude and unreliable, and had to be replaced for the purposes of serious scholarship with more trustworthy modern editions. Indeed the English book of the sixteenth and early-seventeenth century was an inelegant production by comparison with French or Italian publishing of the same period; nor did English printers share our present standards of precision in the reproduction and attribution of texts. But the printed book's present status as a possible endangered species has caused us to reconceptualize it as not merely a "primitive" form to be superseded by our own superior print technology, but as a material, rhetorical artifact worthy of preservation and consultation in its own right rather than as grist for the mill of the twentieth-century editor. Indeed, the interpretive process we call editing is coming to be of strong interest to scholars across the discipline, not only those trained in bibliography and textual studies. As many of us

5. See, respectively, Evelyn B. Tribble, *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville, 1993); Kevin Dunn, *Pretexts of Authority: The Rhetoric of Authorship in the Renaissance Preface* (Stanford, 1994); Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety 1550-1640* (Cambridge, Eng., 1991); Roger Chartier, *The Order of Books*, trans. Lydia G. Cochrane (1992; English edition, Stanford, 1994).

have argued in a number of venues for the past several years, "unediting" needs to become as important to us as editing: we need to reshape the modern edition so that it does not replicate nineteenth- and early twentieth-century hierarchical and exclusionary modes of thought with which our own critical epoch is no longer in sympathy.

Along with the current nostalgic interest in the Renaissance printed book as material object, our discipline at present is avidly interested in manuscript culture, both as it diverged from English print culture of the period and as it contributed to it. It is by now scholarly platitude to liken the customization of a text possible through computer technology to a return to manuscript culture, when a similar customization was standard. Our own recent experience with e-mail may have aided us in understanding some of the dynamics of early modern manuscript culture, which, like the electronic mailbox, permitted the circulation of materials in a space more private than print, more public than the sealed personal letter. Recent and emerging work by Margaret Ezell, Arthur Marotti, and Margaret Downs-Gamble reconceptualizes English Renaissance manuscript culture as not immediately superseded by print, but continuing robust as an alternative, coterie form of literary circulation well past the mid-seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> The collapse of rigid boundaries between the categories of manuscript and print in our own time has aided us in identifying intermediate stages between the two that were far less discernible before the onset of computerization. Harold Love's milestone study of *Manuscript Publication in Seventeenth-Century England* (Oxford and New York, 1993) furthers the breakdown of the dichotomy between manuscript and print by demonstrating the prevalence of manuscript copying as a form of "publication" alongside print.

### III

As this assessment is being written, numerous electronic editions of Renaissance classics are planned or are already coming into being. Internet users can find chunks of Renaissance discourse (scanned-in

6. See Margaret J. M. Ezell, *The Patriarch's Wife: Literary Evidence and the History of the Family* (Chapel Hill, 1987) and her "'To Be Your Daughter in Your Pen': The Social Functions of Literature in the Writings of Lady Elizabeth Brackley and Lady Jane Cavendish," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 51 (1988), 281-96; Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, 1986) and *Manuscript, Print, and the English Renaissance Lyric* (Ithaca, 1994); and Margaret Downs-Gamble's work in progress on dialogue poetry in manuscript.

manuscript and early printed materials as well as online edited versions) among the flotsam and jetsam of cyberspace. As computerized editions of Renaissance texts become more familiar and regularized, our ability to cite material quickly and accurately will no doubt improve exponentially. But at present, the most enticing element of the projection of texts into cyberspace is perhaps a revival of fascination with the wayfaring potential of language. Suddenly, as in Rabelais' famous episode of the frozen words that sound out as they begin to melt, or Chaucer's vision of airborne cacophony in the *House of Fame*, "literary" language has become unmoored from its safe haven on the printed page and come to appear floating, infinitely unfixed. One of the best late-twentieth-century technicians of the revived plasticity of the Renaissance word is Randall McLeod (alias Random Cloud) whose forays into desktop publication playfully disperse Chartier's "order of books" into carnivalesque displays of wandering detritus or kaleidoscopic verbal arrays. Much of the interest presently attached to the plasticity of language relates, no doubt, to what students of orality and writing have termed the "secondary orality" of modern culture: a phenomenon more directly related to the projection of the human voice across the airwaves through various forms of telecommunication than to computerization *per se*. But computerization has intensified the effect by giving visibility to the radical unfixity of language. Words on the computer screen have a different kind of materiality than words in a printed book. Like the human voice via telecommunications, they can magically disappear from a screen in an American living room and reappear almost simultaneously in Malawi or Singapore or Peru.

In a culture of primary orality, so the theory goes, there would be little physical distance between author and audience because in the absence of writing or other reliable techniques for reproduction, the performer and the author would likely be one and the same, and able to gear a specific performance to the perceived tastes and interests of a given audience. Roger Chartier has called attention to the extensive residual orality of Renaissance print culture, and D. F. McKenzie has documented the discomfort frequently expressed by sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century authors of printed books based on performative, oral forms like plays and sermons: their audiences had become newly invisible to them and they, to their reading audiences.<sup>7</sup>

7. Chartier, *The Order of Books*, p. 9; D. F. McKenzie, "Speech-Manuscript-Print," in *New*

Of course the same is true of manuscript "publication," but the broader and more rapid spread of ideas made possible through print intensified the effect. The printed book cuts off a subtle source of interpretive interplay between preacher and congregation, between players on stage and their public, between poets like Ben Jonson and a predominately oral culture of performance for patrons or for his "Sons" at the Mermaid Tavern. To recognize the profound dominance of oral forms over writing even in the Shakespearean playhouse is to gain a vastly altered understanding of the "uncouth" form in which many playtexts have come down to us.<sup>8</sup> Increasingly, we are interpreting the printed book in its Renaissance form as an important register of cultural transition between orality and writing.

When I wrote my survey of new critical trends for *Redrawing the Boundaries* five years ago, the most important development in Renaissance scholarship that I neglected to predict was an important element of our vastly increased concern with oral culture, the rediscovery of Renaissance rhetoric, imagined not in its older textbook sense of a series of Greek terms for fixed figures to be lined up with specific literary examples, but as a giant, anthropomorphized material presence in the culture—a menacing, enticing *Fat Lady* or an *Emperor of Men's Minds* at least implicitly informing every important verbal transaction, whether oral or written, conducted by the educated classes of the period.<sup>9</sup> The revived interest in oral, performative modes has opened our eyes to a vast range of cultural transactions that the written record can only dimly reflect.

At present, for most people not schooled from an early age in the care and feeding of electronic equipment, the computer is a more impersonal artifact than the book. Despite the postmodern "death of the author," we still tend to perceive the material book as a form of authorial presence—part of what we sometimes still call the *corpus*

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*Directions in Textual Studies*, ed. Dave Oliphant, Robin Bradford, and Larry Carver (Austin: The Harry Ransom Center of the University of Texas 1991), pp. 87–109.

8. I am indebted to Richard C. Newton, *Foundations of Ben Jonson's Poetic Style: "Epigrammes" and "The Forrest"* (New York, 1988) and to Martin Elsky, *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing, and Print in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca, 1989); see also the *Hamlet* and *Milton* chapters in my forthcoming *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton*, with projected publication for late 1995 or early 1996 from Routledge.

9. See, e.g., Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (London, 1987); and Wayne A. Rebhorn, *The Emperor of Men's Minds: Literature and the Renaissance Discourse of Rhetoric* (Ithaca, 1995).



of an author's work. We can hold most printed books in our hand and feel their weight. We can experience their formal divisions concretely in terms of quantitative chunks of pages, in terms of an easily identifiable beginning and end. As we read them, we can subtly adjust our expectations in terms of our distance from the final page. Who has not picked up an unfamiliar collection of long short stories, mistaking them for a novel, and felt a curious sense of betrayal when an ending came too soon, before the pages had all been turned? The printed book in the Renaissance was, of course, only in process of acquiring these pleasantly predictable features, and that is part of its fascination. Earlier manuscript books were often highly diverse collections of works by multiple authors. Those involved in the production of the Renaissance book gradually infused it with an increased aura of authorial presence through the use of the portrait frontispiece for living authors (not only dead *auctores*, as had earlier been the case), through the limitation of its contents to the works or work of a single person so that the book and the conceptualization of the author could be perceived as coterminous, and through what Joan Webber discussed decades ago as *The Eloquent "I,"* the projection of an authorial personality.<sup>10</sup>

These devices were, at least in part, products of the decreasing orality of print culture—a means for diminishing the newly imposed distance between the author and the reader. It is both amusing and comforting to recognize how closely our uneasiness with the unleashing of previously fixed text into the nebulous freefall of cyberspace approximates the anxiety experienced by Renaissance authors as they surrendered their writings into what appeared to them as the impersonality and uncontrolled dispersal of print. For many computer users at present, cyberspace seriously diminishes the aura of authorial presence associated with the printed book. The onscreen text is somehow less personalized, more anonymous, even if accompanied with the name of an author. It is difficult to judge how much of this perceived distance is attributable to the newness of the technology and how much is inherent in its alteration of the experience of writing and reading. Some of us are slow to surrender the familiar tactile and visual elements of book reading to the very different demands of the computer, just as sixteenth- and seventeenth-century readers and

10. *The Eloquent "I": Style and Self in Seventeenth-Century Prose* (Madison, 1968).

writers needed considerable time to adjust to the decreased auditory stimulation of the printed book. And unlike the quarto and octavo, the computer cannot be held comfortably in the hand. Part of the decreased aura of authorial presence experienced by users of the computer may relate to the fact that it does not offer the same experience of solitary intimacy with reading material that we have come to expect from the book. The book, once acquired, can be operated without additional equipment, while the computer requires an elaborate continuing network of software, servicing, and electrical support. Then too, the fact that we can read and write nearly simultaneously onscreen—that we can enter into and alter a literary text without visible rupture between the “original” and our supplement—seriously diminishes the reverence in which authorship has been held for several centuries.

#### IV

Which came first: postmodernism or computer technology, with its uncanny ability visually to replicate phenomena with which postmodernism is associated—the “death of the author,” the decline of “objectivity” and of hierarchical systems of authority, the unfixing and free play of signifiers? The temporal overlap between the intellectual development and the technological is more significant than most of us have acknowledged, even though the question of which came first is unanswerable. Paradoxically, as I argued in more detail five years ago, computerization has, through its desolidification of the printed word, helped to reify recent postmodern reconceptualizations of the text and its localized environments. But at the same time, the new technology is capable of creating its own order of generalization and even of transcendence. At the beginning of the present essay, I referred to the computer’s displacement of originary violence, and one of the areas in which this is most visible is through its easy erasure of conflicted boundaries. The cyberspace network operates for the most part independently of national borders and the bloody territoriality that so often accompanies nationalism. Many modern states trace their origins back to revolutions or other forms of originary violence, and computerization, too, began as an element of our national defense. But the networking that has accompanied its development is based on a model of intertwined and interdependent nodes

rather than on the self-definition through separation from a negativized other that is characteristic of nationalism. That is not to suggest that the Internet is necessarily a peaceable environment: many users vent strange passions within its nearly anonymous space. As this essay goes to press, the software program named Satan and designed to probe the weaknesses of computerized networks (either one's own or those of others) is about to be released free of charge; its antidote Courtney, which identifies a Satan attack and locates the machine from which it was launched, will also be distributed free. Elizabeth Eisenstein has argued that the cataclysmic set of events now known as the Protestant Reformation would not have had the impact they did had it not been for the invention of print, which disseminated new theological ideas rapidly across vast territories and created an invisible, international audience of sympathizers with Luther's attacks on ecclesiastical abuses.<sup>11</sup> The peaceable invention of print thus helped spawn violence as well as renewal. Many now speculate whether the opening of cyberspace may have similarly cataclysmic effects at present invisible and unpredictable. But thus far at least, users have had a common interest in keeping the network open and functioning. It would be reckless to assert that the Internet is responsible for the end of the Cold War, but the computer has clearly been one important vehicle for the astounding alterations in the geopolitical landscape of the past several years, as traditional national boundaries and allegiances are weakened to accommodate common markets and other forms of international cooperation.

Until recently, the reigning disciplinary models in the field of Renaissance studies were all based on originary violence: the New Historicism, with its Cold-war paradigm of subversion and containment and its Foucauldian emphasis on discipline and punishment; Freudian psychoanalysis with its primal scene and Lacanian, with its theory of castration; "vulgar" Marxism, with its insistence on the inherence of class warfare to the capitalist system; first- and second-wave feminism, with their emphasis on patriarchal violence. The primary way in which we have made significant interpretive meaning since the seventies and early eighties has been by using one or more of the reigning interpretive models to demonstrate a set of social or psychological oppositions operating beneath the surface of a given

11. *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change* (Cambridge, Eng., 1979), 2 vols.

text. Perhaps because a new set of still undefined paradigms is becoming faintly visible in the discipline, many of us have become acutely aware of our addiction to the generation of meaning by the establishment of a system of oppositions. How many times have I sat in my office listening to a graduate student's ideas for a paper, and become animated and involved at the point at which I could understand the proposed subject in terms of one of our reigning paradigms of violence? Like most people of my own immediate postwar and Vietnam War generation, I tend to perceive underlying violence and/or oppression as what is "really real" about any given subject.

For the young scholars presently in their twenties, however, at least those with whom I have had contact, I sense a very different critical agenda emerging—one based on the model of the network rather than on one or another form of opposition. As my Trekkie teenaged daughter put it to me the other day, "What's life? We're all on one big holodeck." Students now are adept at deconstructing a text's evasions of its own agonistic underpinnings, but doing so does not give them the same pleasure it did us because they do not accept conflict as inherently more real than its sublimation or evasion. To this emerging generation, mainstream critical work in the field of Renaissance/early modern studies looks intense, narrow, and obsessive in its passion for contestation, its preference for linear argument, and its (to them) rather joyless lack of performative energy.

## V

What will the new work in Renaissance look like as it emerges? Our standard term for such work is "cutting edge," in what I suspect is yet another half-submerged paradigm of violence. I predict that the new work will be strongly performative, like emerging work in the field of queer studies, and strongly non-linear in structure. Modelled upon the computer network, which can accommodate contradiction without the fullscale polarization my generation associates with contradiction, the new work in Renaissance/early modern studies will explore its subject from a series of mutually contradictory vantage points rather than insisting on a single perspective. Such decentering of linear argument is not necessarily new, even though our technological model for describing it is. We may think, for example, of the favorite Renaissance emblem of the beehive, or of Hugh of St. Victor's consid-

erably earlier image of the honeycomb as a model for unity: each individual cell may contain radically disparate material, but the cells are all held in unity by the patterning of the comb itself. As an alternative to more rigid twentieth-century models of artistic unity, recent scholars in our field are beginning to adopt chaos theory as a way of understanding the controlled randomness of a literary text. John Rumrich's *Milton Unbound*, for example, forthcoming from Cambridge University Press, includes a final chapter proposing chaos theory as an alternative to the more familiar models for understanding Miltonic unity.

Above all, as befits performative analysis of an era that was itself highly performative, the new work in Renaissance/early modern studies is playful. Having had a solid dose of agon in the violence-centered criticism of the past twenty years, many young scholars are interested in recapturing Renaissance pleasure—not as a way of masking the pain and unease that texts can produce, but as a way of readjusting the responsive spectrum away from our recent suspicion of pleasure. Of course violence can itself be a strong form of pleasure, but by no means the only form to be encountered in our chosen field of specialization. New work will continue the agenda of recent decades: continue to expand the canon of Renaissance texts; to erode the boundary between “literature” and other cultural materials; and to reinterpret the period from a vantage point beyond nationalist, racial, and ethnic parochialism. Given the increased interest in work with manuscript materials, we are likely to see a thorough shakeup of time-honored authorial attributions, particularly seventeenth-century attributions of anonymous manuscript material to sixteenth-century authors. Good new work in the field will frequently have a strong revisionary archival component combined with a strong interest in recapturing the full range of pleasures generated by a given text or textual community. In my department and probably elsewhere as well, graduate students sophisticated in computer technology are beginning to conclude dissertations with “performative” chapters in hypertext that allow readers to work or *play* online with the concepts and altered textual spaces created by the preceding expository chapters.

To the extent that the new work continues to use paradigms inherited from the past, it will appropriate them to very different critical purposes. Those of us who are fiftyish or older and schooled in a

hermeneutics of suspicion may find the new work unsatisfying and even dangerous in its refusal to confirm the interpretive patterns through which we have made meaning for ourselves. If I am right in predicting a Cyberspace Renaissance, in which many of the "Renaissance" energies we have held suspect are revitalized within the new textual space enabled by computerization and computer networking, then the speed and energy with which it emerges will depend, in part, on our own receptivity to the new and seemingly chaotic methodology. The coming age of fresh exploration and revitalization will likely give way eventually to consolidation, familiarization, and eventually a cynical backlash, as in the late Renaissance with which we are already familiar. But, as in the case of the late Renaissance, it may in the meantime have altered teaching and scholarship so fundamentally that a return to the past is not only impossible but also inconceivable. There is no point in dwelling on the dark potentialities of the new technology when we have, in fact, no way of predicting its eventual effects. Renaissances happen by infrequently enough that they should be enjoyed in the process. I, for one, await the Cyberspace Renaissance with great interest, and hope to live to see its zenith.

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