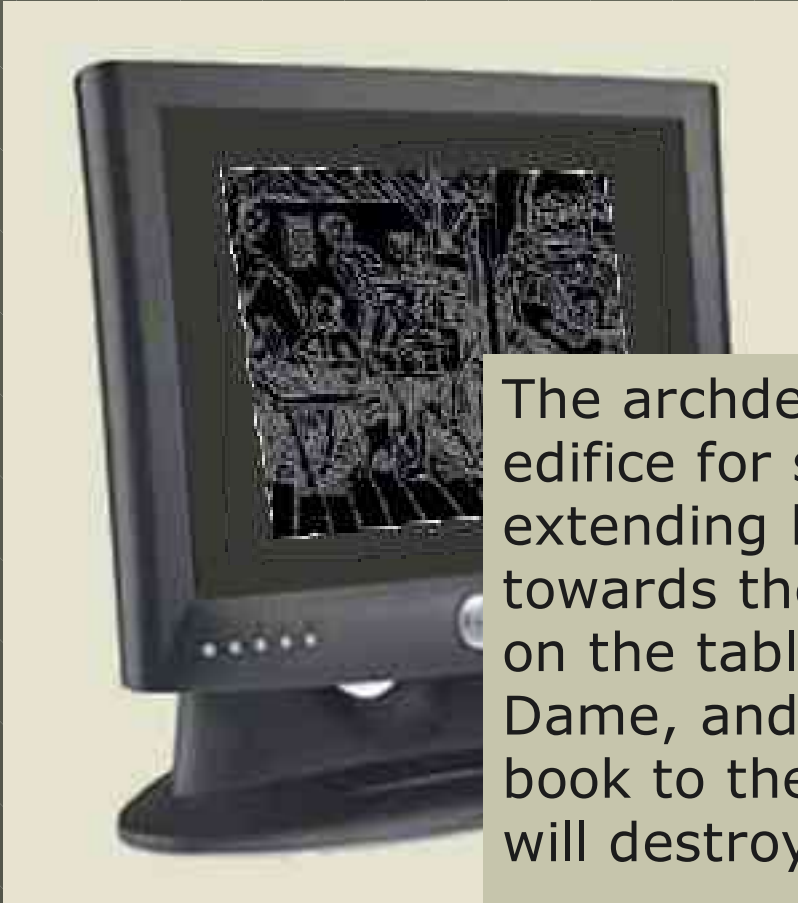


# What's the Matter with Books?



David J. Gunkel  
Northern Illinois University  
dgunkel@niu.edu

# Ceci tuera cela



The archdeacon gazed at the gigantic edifice for some time in silence, then extending his right hand, with a sigh, towards the printed book which lay open on the table, and his left towards Notre-Dame, and turning a sad glance from the book to the church,--"Alas," he said, "this will destroy that [ceci tuera cela]."

Victor Hugo  
Notre-Dame de Paris

# WRITING SPACE

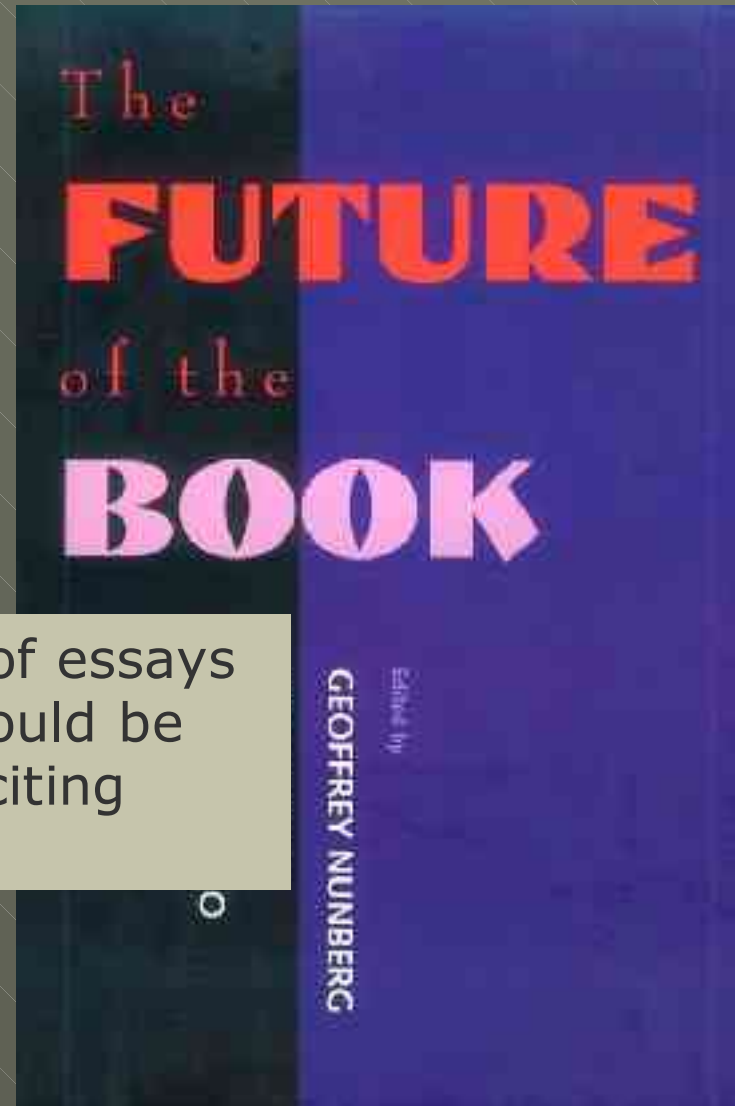
*The Computer, Hypertext,  
and the History of Writing*

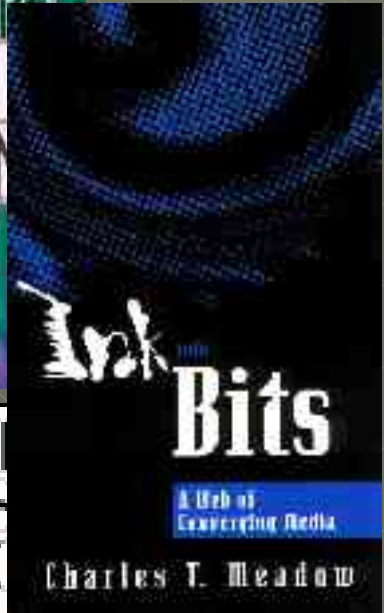
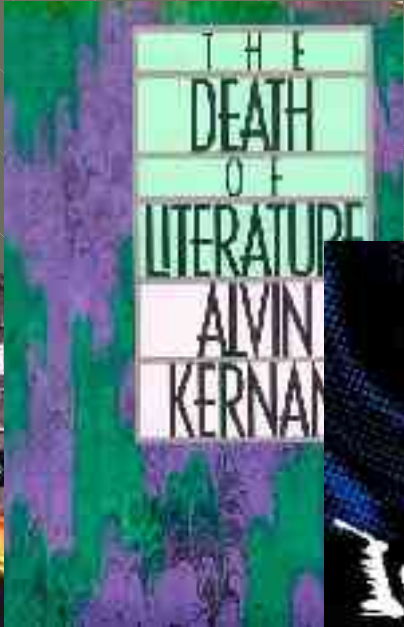
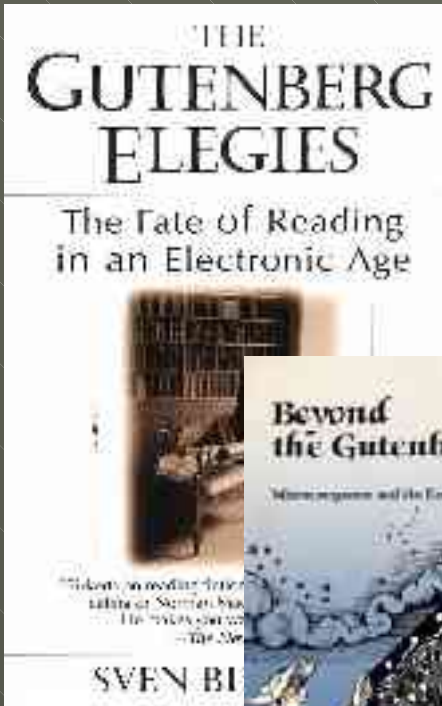
— Jay David B.

Today we are living in the late age of print. The evidence of senescence, if not senility, is all around us. And as we look up from our computer keyboards to the books on our shelves, we must ask ourselves whether "will this destroy that (p. 2).

The issue is not whether print technology will completely disappear; books may long continue to be printed for certain kinds of texts and for luxury consumption. But the idea and ideal of the book will change: print will no longer define the organization and presentation of knowledge, as it has for the past five centuries (p. 2).

No conference or collection of essays on the future of the book would be complete without someone citing these words (p. 10).





1. The Paradox of a Book

2. Signs of Print

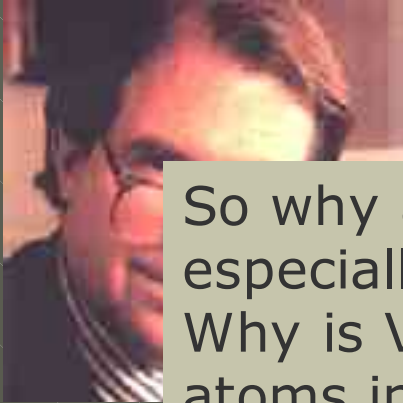
3. Conclusions

# The Paradox of a Book

One of the ironies of our culture's fascination with virtual technologies is its fondness for consuming books and articles that proclaim the death of print culture--or its disappearance into the matrix

Robert Markley  
*Virtual Realities and Their Discontents*  
(1996)

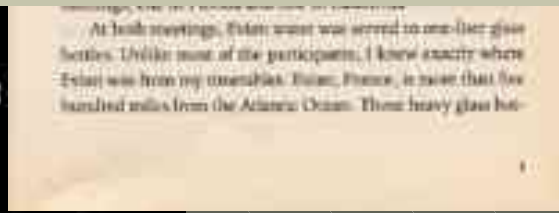
# The Paradox of a Book



INAI RES



So why an old-fashioned book, Negroponte, especially one without a single illustration? Why is Vintage shipping *Being Digital* as atoms instead of bits, when these pages, unlike Evian water, can be so easily rendered into digital form, from whence they came? (p. 7).

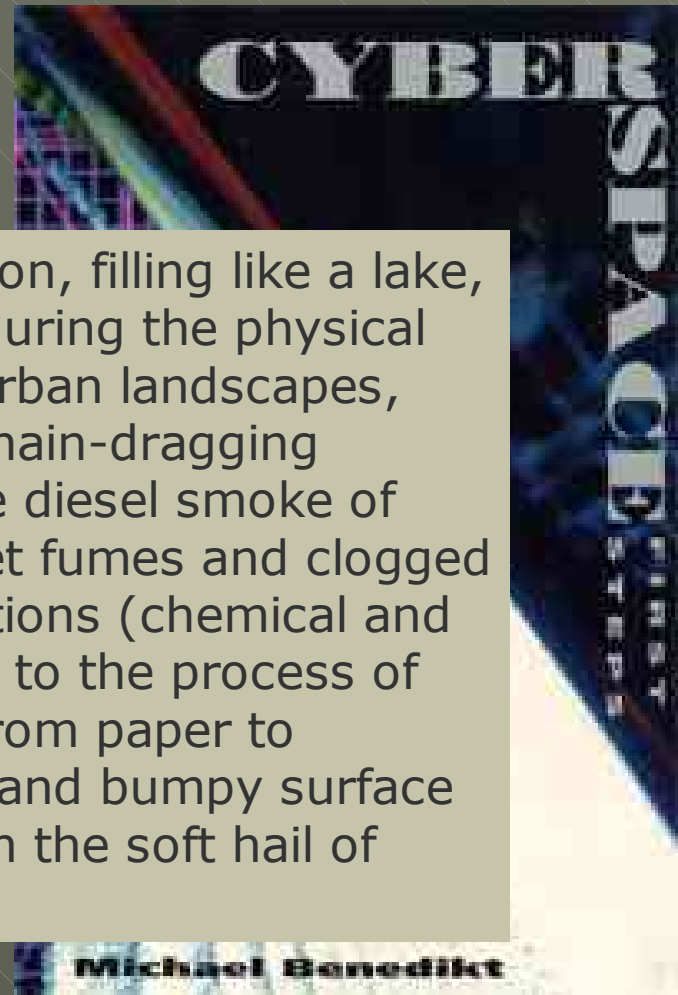






# The Paradox of a Book

Cyberspace is the realm of pure information, filling like a lake, siphoning the jangle of messages transfiguring the physical world, decontaminating the natural and urban landscapes, redeeming them, saving them from the chain-dragging bulldozers of the paper industry, from the diesel smoke of courier and post office trucks, from the jet fumes and clogged airports...from all the inefficiencies, pollutions (chemical and informational), and corruptions attendant to the process of moving information attached to *things*--from paper to brains--across, over, and under the vast and bumpy surface of the earth rather than letting it fly free in the soft hail of electrons in cyberspace (p. 3).



# The Paradox of a Book



It is the purpose of the present book to study primarily the print phase of alphabetic culture. The print phase, however, has encountered today the new organic and biological modes of the electronic world... And it is this reversal of character that makes our age 'connatural,' as it were, with non-literate experience, simply because we have recreated it electronically within our own culture (p. 45-46).

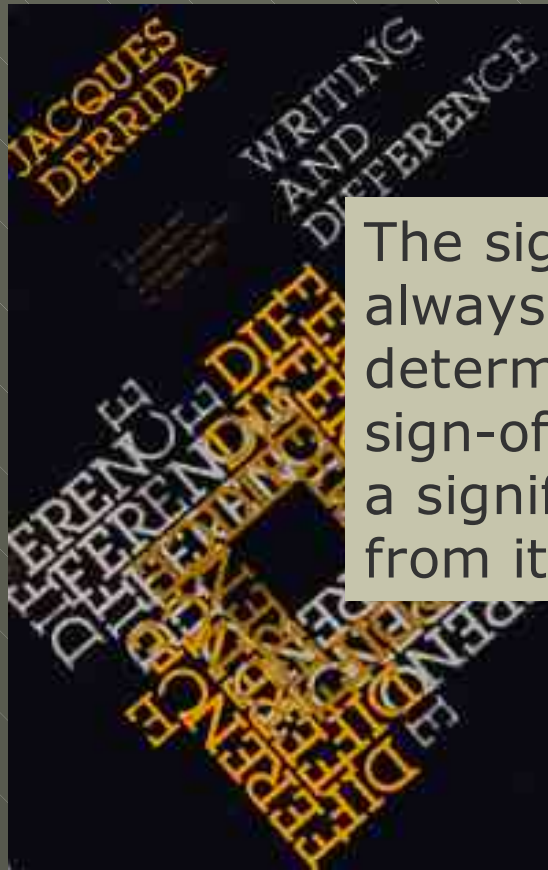


# Signs of Print

It is not surprising that this is a book  
and not a computer program.

Rob Wittig  
*Invisible Rendezvous*  
(1994)

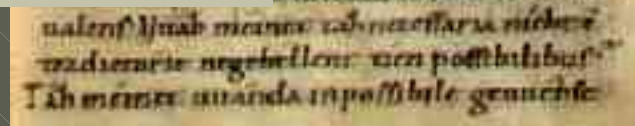
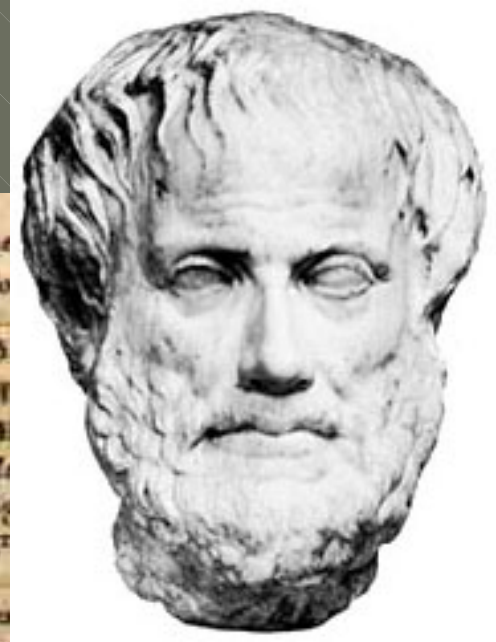
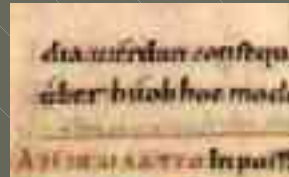
# Signs of Print



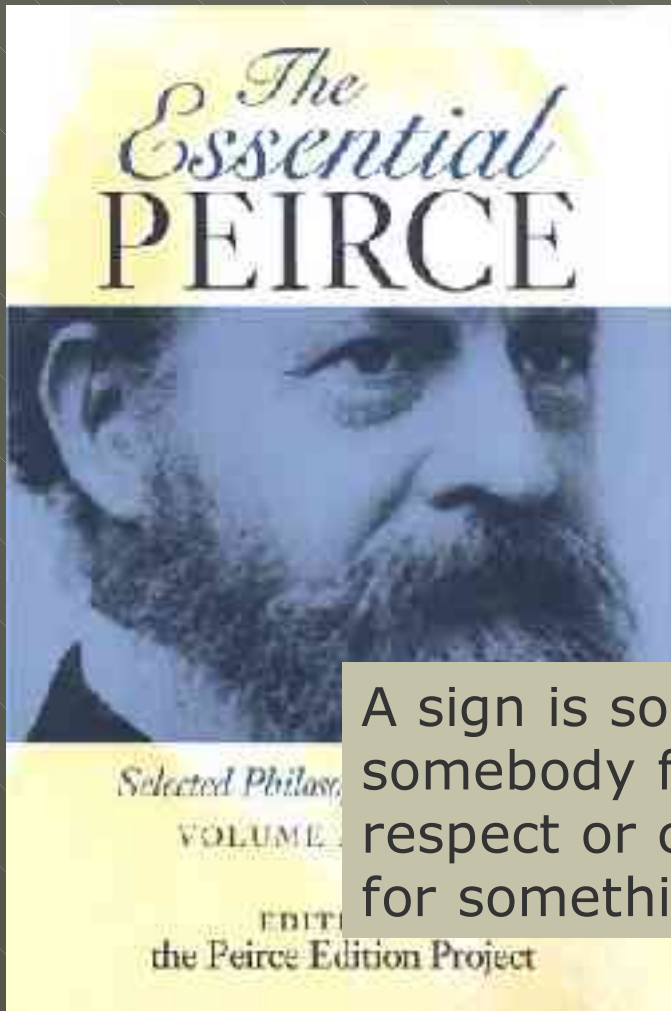
The signification “sign” has always been understood and determined, in its meaning, as sign-of, a signifier referring to a signified, a signifier different from its signified. (p. 281)

# Signs of Print

Spoken words are the signs of mental experience and written words are the signs of spoken words. Just as all men have not the same writing, so all men have not the same speech sounds, but the mental experiences, of which these are the primary signs are the same for all, as also are those things of which our experiences are the images" (1, 16a 3)



# Signs of Print



A sign is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity...the sign stands for something, *its object* (p. 228).



# Signs of Print

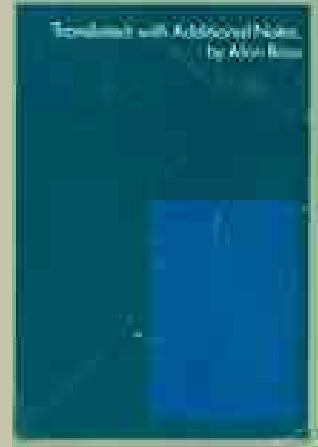
The sign is usually said to be put in the place of the thing itself, the present thing, 'thing' here standing equally for meaning or referent. The sign represents the present in its absence. It takes the place of the present. When we cannot grasp or show the thing, state the present, the being-present, when the present cannot be presented, we signify, we go through the detour of the sign. (p. 9)

Jacques Derrida

**MARGINS**

Philosophy

Translated with Annotated Notes  
by Avijit Kumar

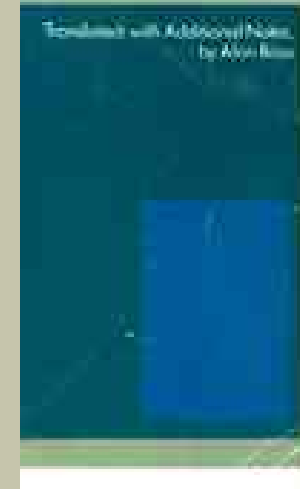


# Signs of Print

This structure presupposes that the sign, which defers presence, is conceivable only on the basis of the presence that it defers and moving toward the deferred presence that it aims to reappropriate. According to this classical semiology, the substitution of the sign for the thing itself is both *secondary* and *provisional*: secondary due to an original and lost presence from which the sign thus derives; provisional as concerns this final and missing presence toward which the sign in this sense is a movement of mediation. (p. 9).

Jacques Derrida

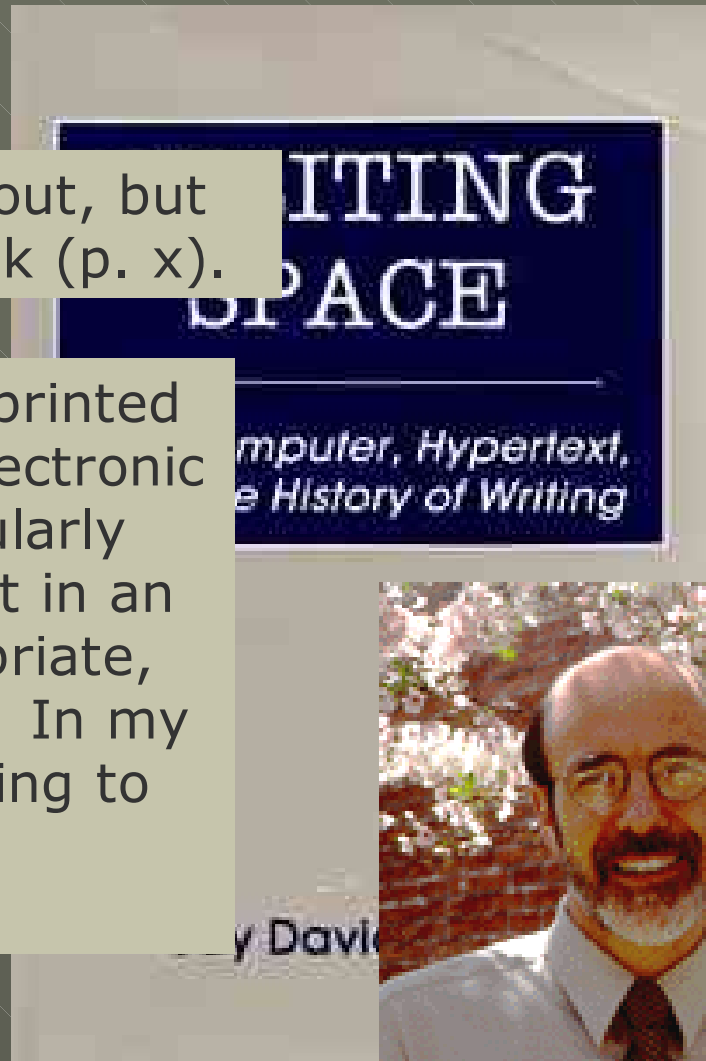
MARGINS  
Philosophy



# Signs of Print

This printed book can be about, but cannot be, an electronic book (p. x).

Because the subject of this printed book is the coming of the electronic book, I have found it particularly difficult to organized my text in an appropriate manner--appropriate, that is, to the printed page. In my mind the argument kept trying to cast itself intertextually or "hypertextually" (p. ix).



# Signs of Print

At the end of this printed book, the reader has the opportunity to begin again--by working through the text on a computer diskette that can be obtained by sending in the order form enclosed in the book. The diskette, which runs on Macintosh computers, contains a hypertextual rewriting of this book. The hypertext shadows the printed version, presenting paragraphs that appear in print and offering hypertextual notes that expand particular ideas. These elaborations could not be included in the printed version because of limited space or because a particular digression did not seem appropriate to the linearity of print (p. 240).

# Signs of Print

290 14. Introduction

technology who interferes. However, and this is an essential and important production of, in other words, there is the explanation of the technology of

# ING

## Writing Space: A Hypertext...

... is a hypertextual companion to Rieber's *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing*, which illustrates many of the concepts discussed in the book. Moreover, the hypertext version of *Writing Space* is an example of the possibilities hypertext affords its users for extending the traditional boundaries of the printed book. It allows users to make new connections, to re-arrange parts of sections of the text and even encourages users to alter the text as they go along.

### System Requirements:

A Macintosh Computer with at least one megabyte of RAM, System 6.0 or greater, Finder 5.0 or greater, and at least two disk drives. A hard disk is strongly recommended.

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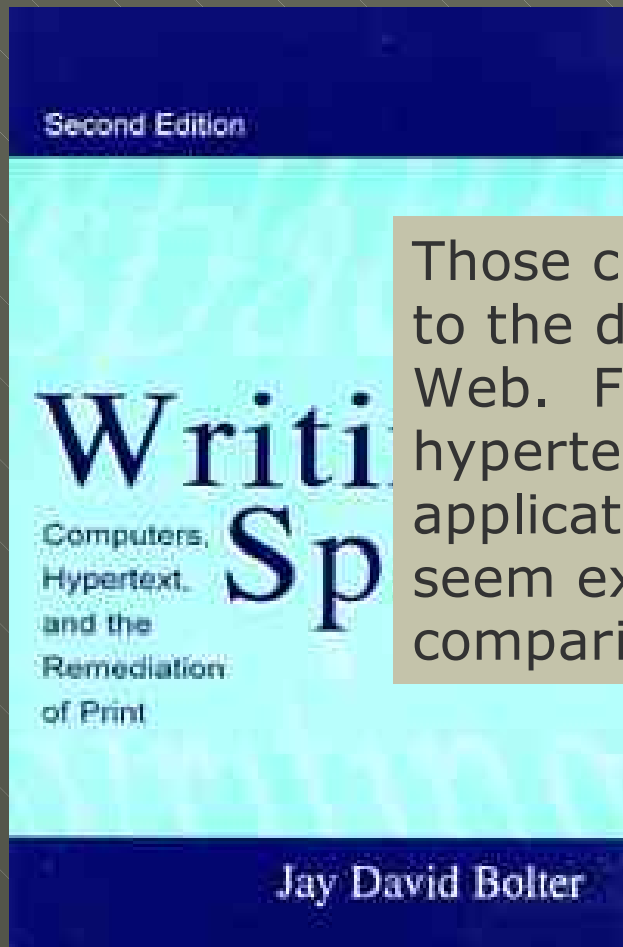
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... shows to readers in more or less detail. The book is the great, essential book to read for the signs of print that is now going...

The Internet is a medium for the signs of print that is now going...

# Signs of Print



Those changes are due almost entirely to the development of the World Wide Web. For better or worse, the web is hypertext for us today; all the earlier applications of stand-alone hypertext seem experimental or provisional in comparison (p. xi).

# Signs of Print

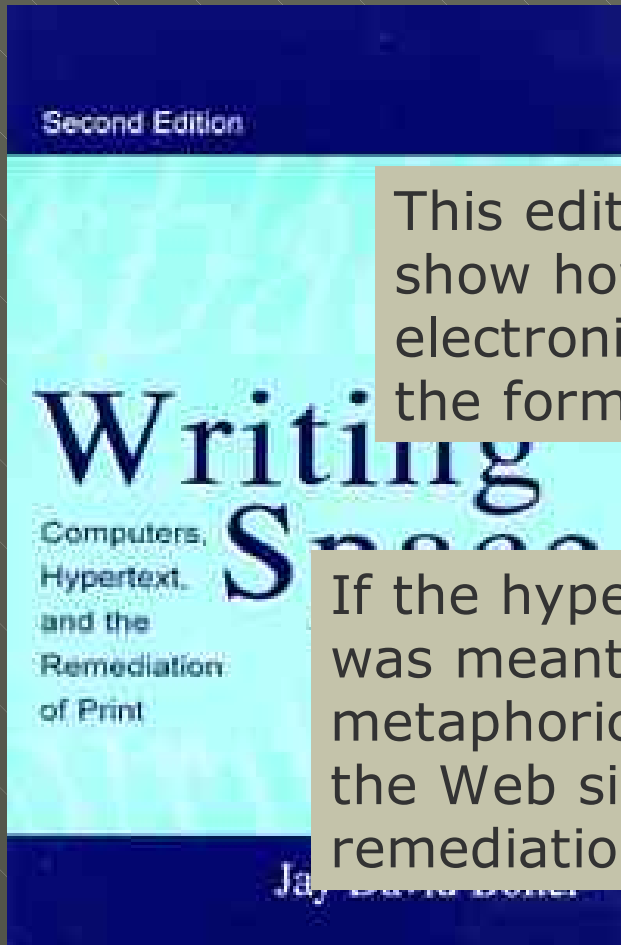


## 11

### The Web Site

The first edition of this book was accompanied by a hypertext version on a diskette. It was a stand-alone hypertext that used links to attempt to define a shadow text—a text that confirmed, elaborated on, and sometimes reversed the printed version. The second edition has an associated Web site instead: ([www.cc.gatech.edu/~lxb/ter/writingspace/](http://www.cc.gatech.edu/~lxb/ter/writingspace/)). It has become a fairly common practice to accompany a printed book with a Web site, often to provide ancillary material that the book omitted due to limitations of space or the limitations of the printed medium itself. A Web site can also contain multimedia features, such as digitized audio and video, that the book cannot. As a respectful remediation, the Web site for *Writing Space* does not seek to render the printed version unnecessary. Much of the text is not included in the site. It is

# Signs of Print

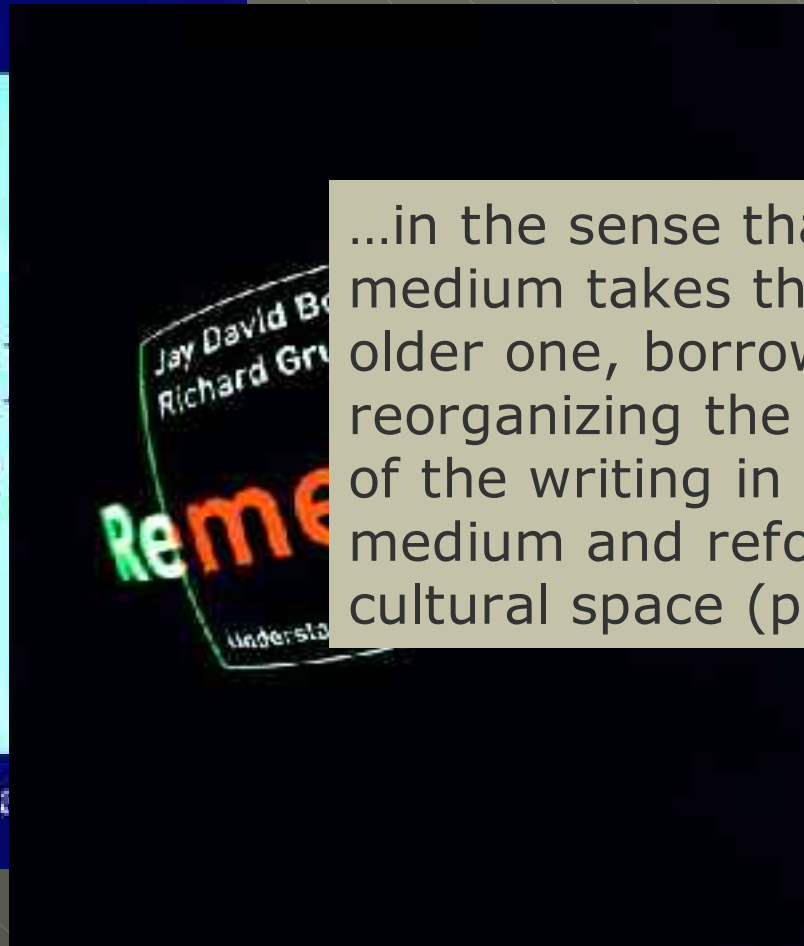
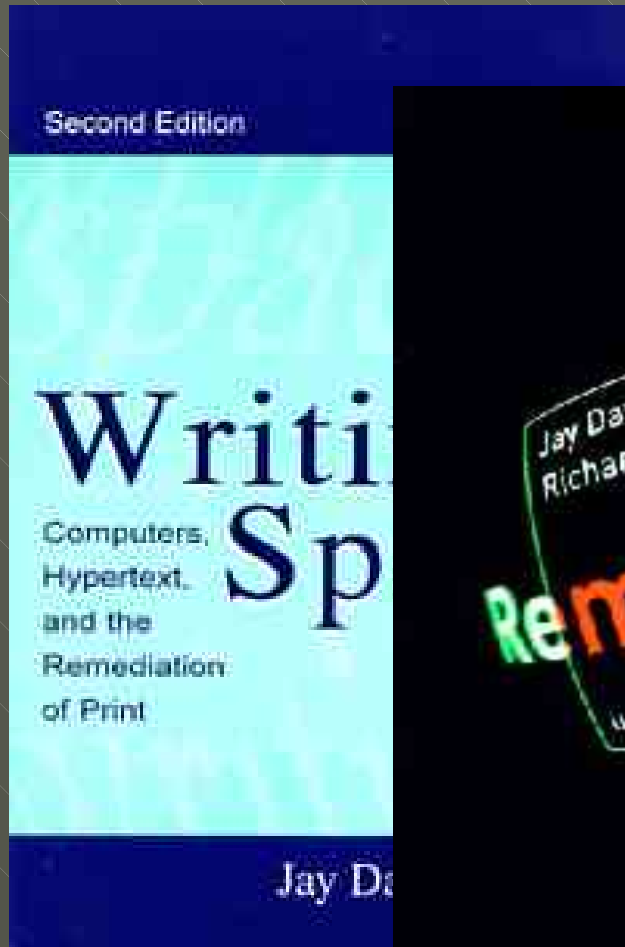


This edition of *Writing Space* is meant...to show how hypertext and other forms of electronic writing refashion or 'remediate' the forms and genres of print" (p. xii)

If the hypertext diskette for the first edition was meant to provide a shadow text, a metaphoric replacement of the printed text, the Web site is instead an extension, and a remediation of the printed text... (p. 214).

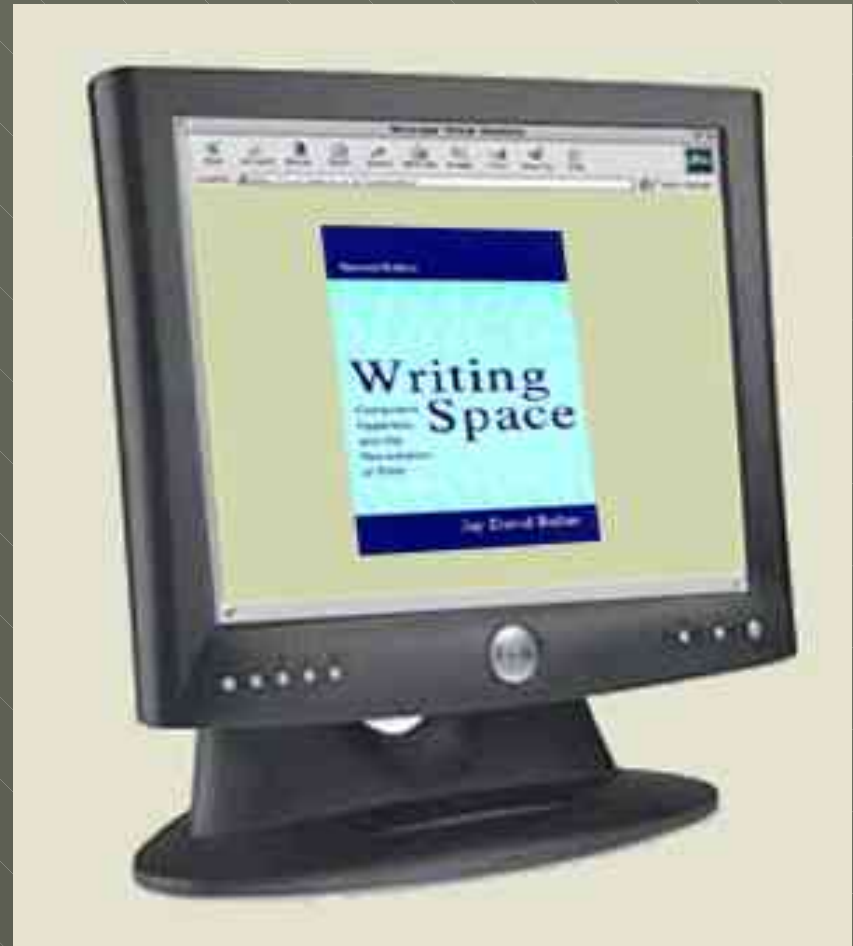
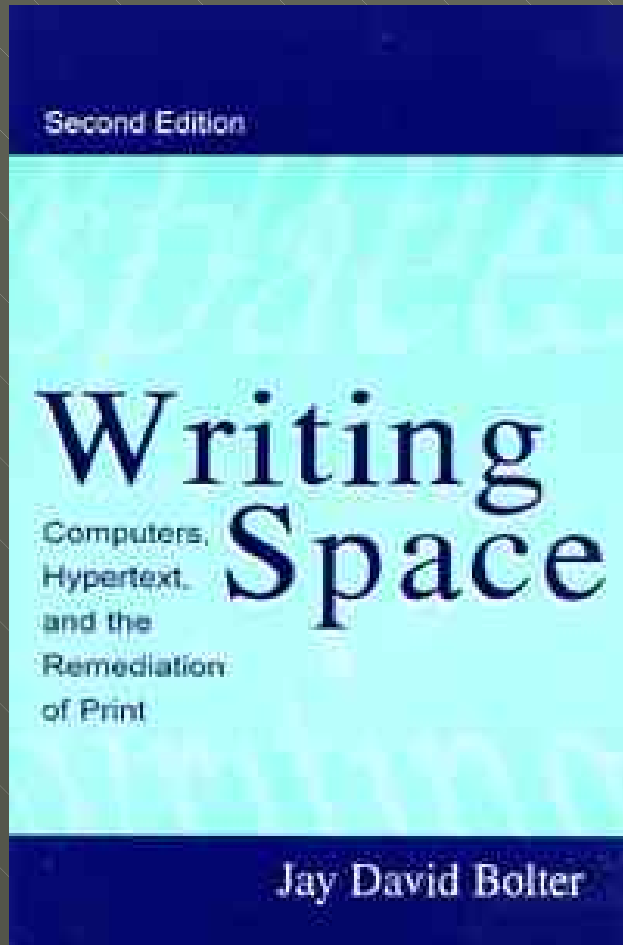


# Signs of Print



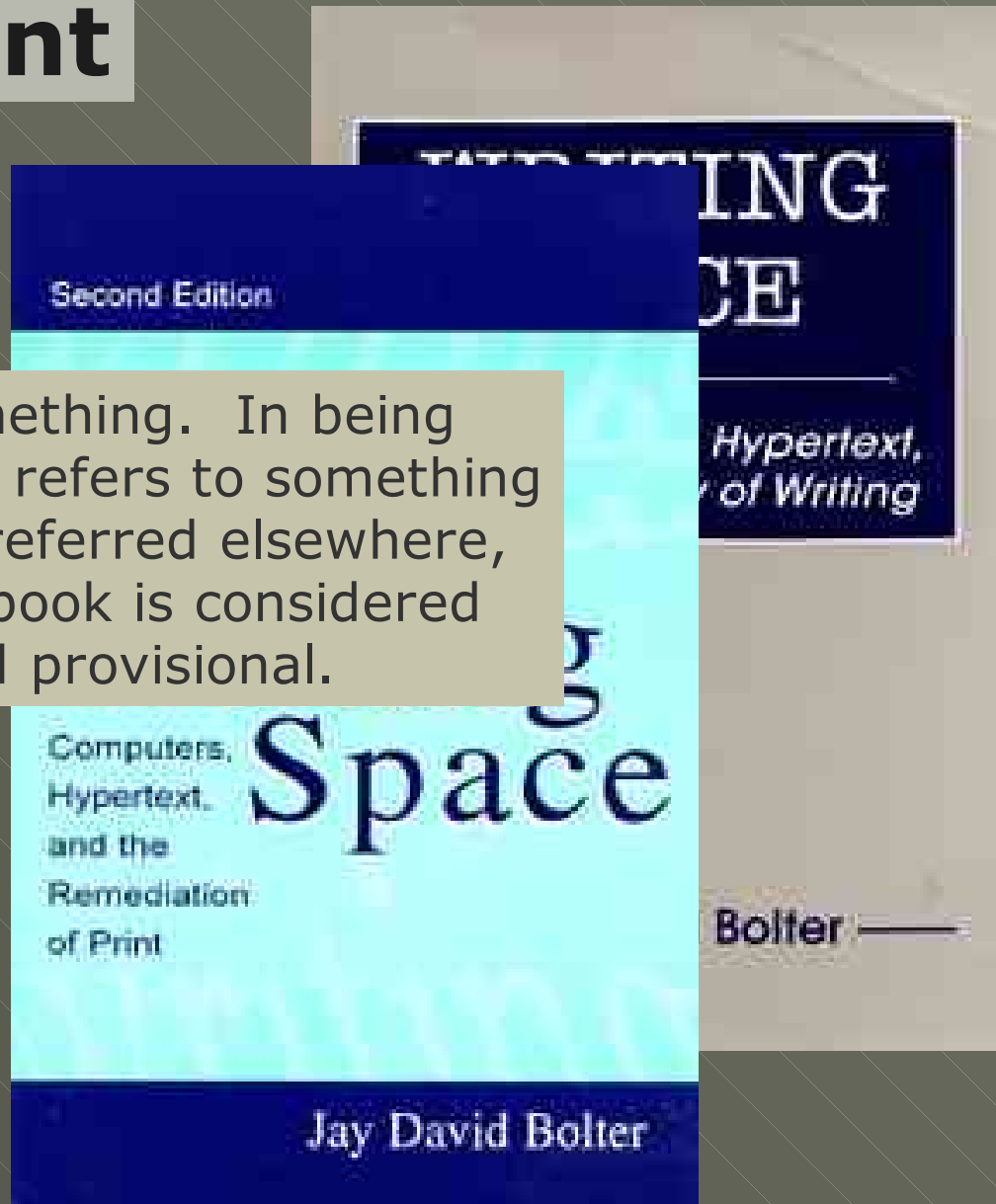
...in the sense that a newer medium takes the place of an older one, borrowing and reorganizing the characteristics of the writing in the older medium and reformulating its cultural space (p. 23).

# Signs of Print



# Signs of Print

A book is about something. In being *about*, it defers and refers to something else. And in being referred elsewhere, the material of the book is considered to be secondary and provisional.

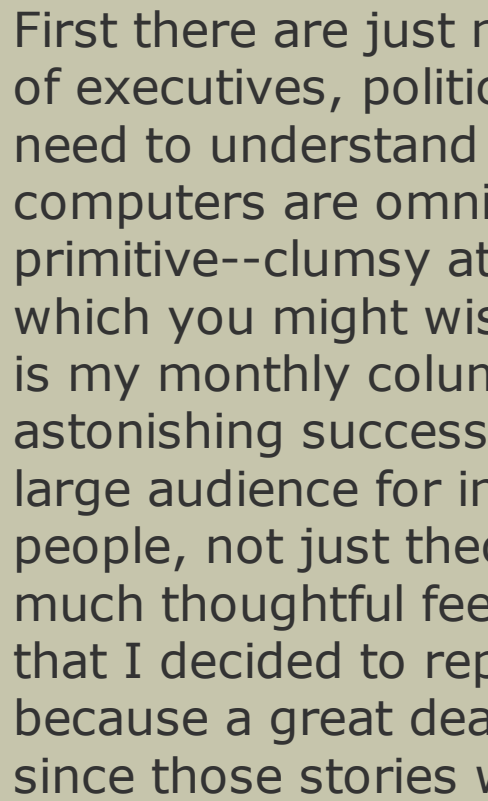


# Signs of Print



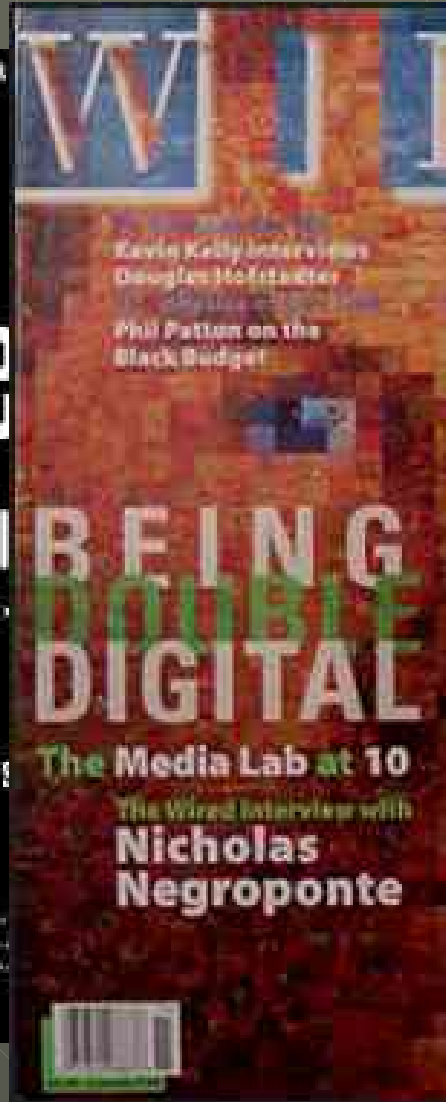
So why an old-fashioned book, Negroponte, especially one without a single illustration? (p. 7).

# Signs of Print



First there are just not enough digital media in the hands of executives, politicians, parents, and all those who most need to understand this radical new culture. Even where computers are omnipresent, the current interface is primitive--clumsy at best, and hardly something with which you might wish to curl up in bed. A second reason, is my monthly column in *Wired* magazine. The rapid and astonishing success of *Wired* has shown that there is a large audience for information about digital life-styles and people, not just theory and equipment. I received so much thoughtful feedback from my (text only) column that I decided to repurpose many of the early themes, because a great deal has changed even in the short time since those stories were written (p. 7).

# Signs of Print



# Signs of Print



1) digital technology is not able to present itself as such; it either is not present or, if present, is ostensibly inaccessible.

2) Print remains accessible, convenient, and not yet completely obsolete.

# Signs of Print



Nicholas Negroponte writes about the future with the authority of someone who has spent a lot of time there.  
(Douglas Adams)

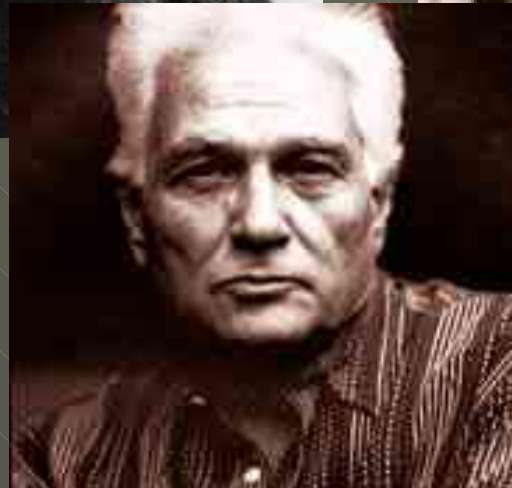


# Conclusions

There is nothing outside the text.

Jacques Derrida  
*Of Grammatology*  
(1967)

# Conclusions



# Conclusions

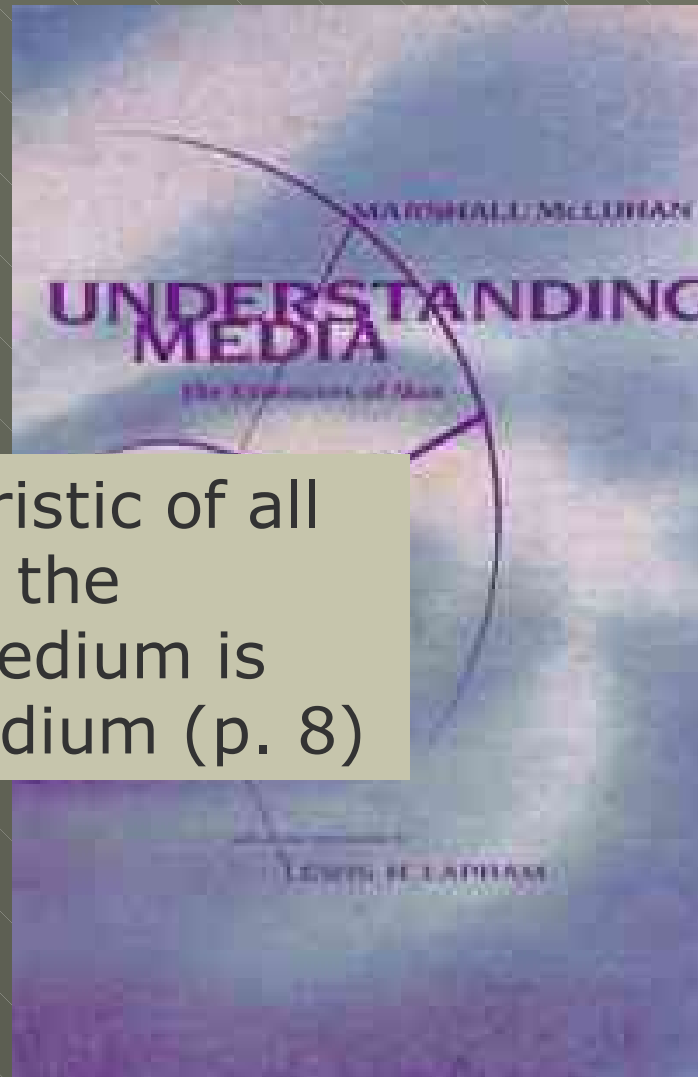
1096 sign ■ silent

words or to represent a complex notion. 3 is one of the 12 divisions of the zodiac. 4 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 5 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 6 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 7 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 8 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 9 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 10 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 11 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation. 12 is a unit of measure for a flat or sharp used in musical notation.

For the dictionary has always been the classic example of the semiotic principle that signs refer only to other signs... We can only define a sign in terms of other signs of the same nature. This lesson is known to every child who discovers that fundamental paradox of the dictionary: that if you do not know what some words mean you can never use the dictionary to learn what other words mean. The definition of any word, if pursued far enough through the dictionary, will lead you in circles. This paradox is the foundation of semiotics. A sign system is a set of rules for relating elements. The rules are arbitrary, and the system they generate is self-contained. There is no way to get 'outside' the system to the world represented, because, as in the dictionary, signs can only lead you elsewhere in the same system (p. 197).

# Conclusions

This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the "content" of any medium is always another medium (p. 8)



# Conclusions

1. There is nothing outside the text

# Conclusions

Electronic readers and writers have finally arrived at the land promised (or threatened) by post-modern theory for two-decades: the world of pure signs. While traditional humanists and deconstructionists have been battling over the arbitrary, self-referential character of writing, computer specialists, oblivious to this struggle, have been building a world of electronic signs in which the battle is over (p. 204).

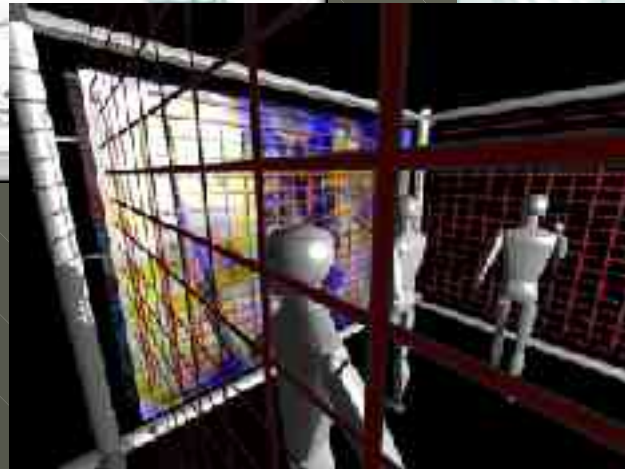


WRITING

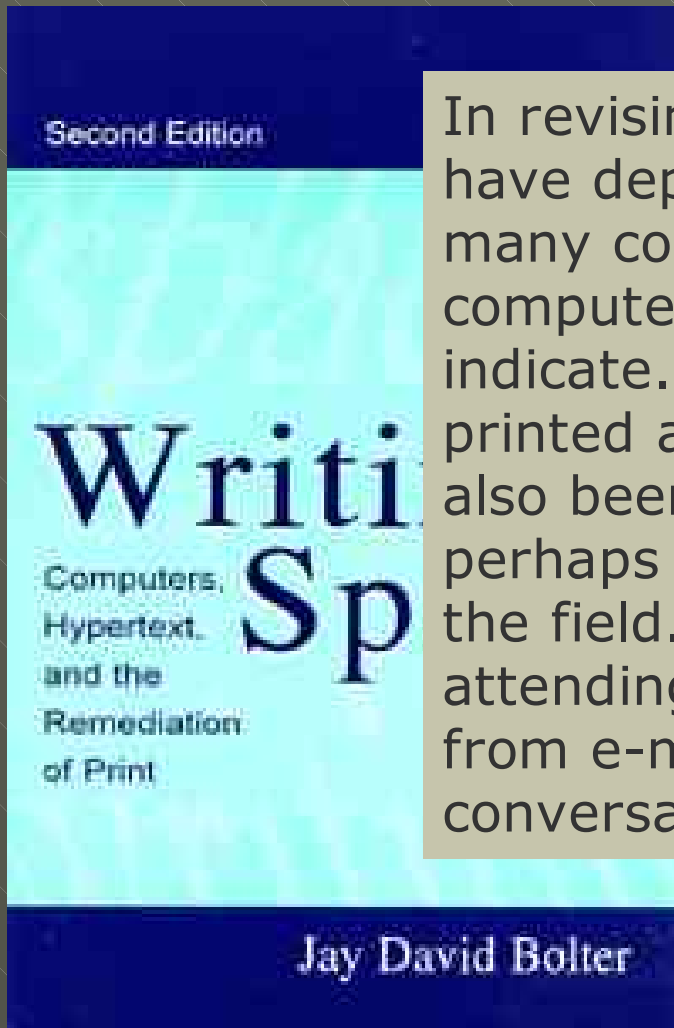
perlex,  
Writing

— Jay David Bolter —

# Conclusions



# Conclusions



In revising this book, as I have noted, I have depended on the published work of many colleagues in literary hypertext and computer science, as the references indicate. In addition to drawing on their printed and electronic publications, I have also been privileged to know many, perhaps most, of the important figures in the field. I have benefitted from attending their conference papers and from e-mail discussions and private conversations (p. xiv).



# Conclusions

About *prep* – with regard to,  
concerning, concerned with

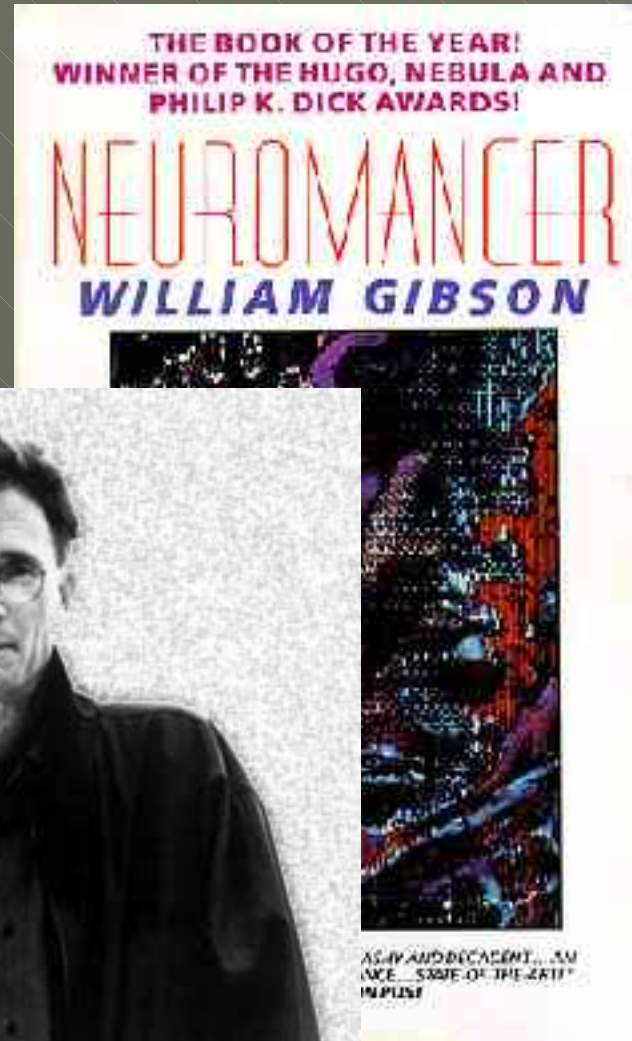
About *adv* – on all sides of,  
circling around, indirect



# Conclusions

## 2. Material matters

# Conclusions



# Conclusions

3. Examination of technology needs to be self-reflective

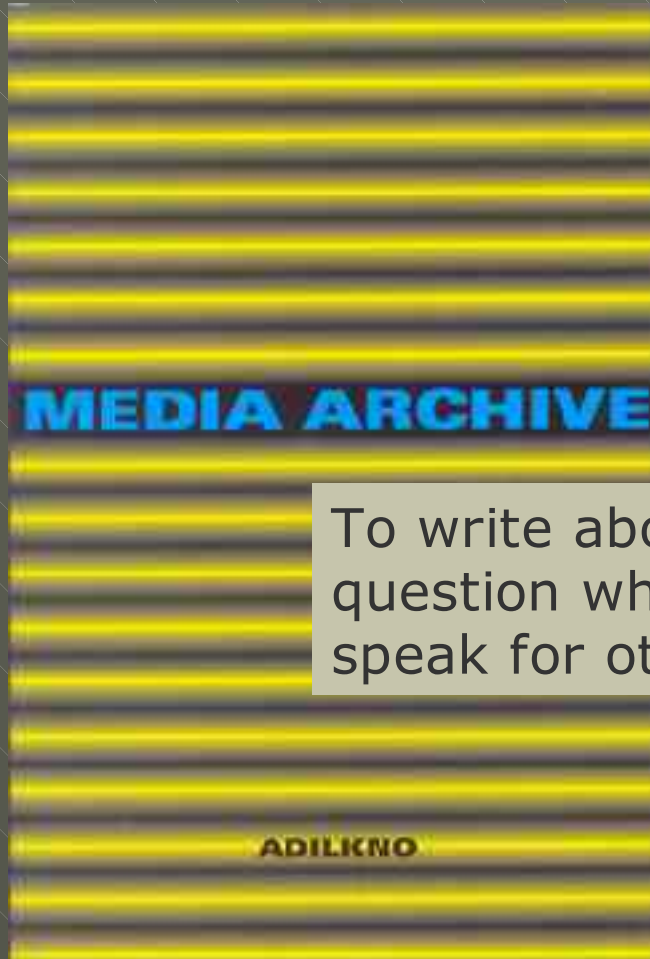
# Conclusions



It characterizes the epistemic quandary of writers from diverse fields in which the act of the investigation is itself implicated in the object of inquiry as the condition of possibility.

Undoubtedly, the presence of circular reasoning poses a methodological problem of considerable difficulty, but, as Martin Heidegger among others has assured us, it is not as pernicious as it appears on first blush (p. ix-x).

# Conclusions



To write about media is to ask the question what give writing the right to speak for other media (p. 1).

