Blue Pencil

Book Editors Braving It Out in the New World

Richard Walsh gave us an elucidating overview of his vision for the future of books.

Twenty years ago it was fashionable to predict not only the end of books but the end of paper. The bold promise was "the paperless office". But this has proven a mirage. Worldwide the consumption of paper for writing and printing has in fact doubled since 1982. Indeed, the fastest growth in the last hundred years came during the 1980s, just as the personal computer was spreading.

The Internet is clearly behind much of this automated logorrhea, this avalanche of words on paper; by distributing ever more information cheaply and easily, it provides more things to print out. Several hundred million e-mails are exchanged each day in the USA alone, and most recipients keep hard copies of some of the more important ones. About 200 million pages of the *New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Wall Street Journal* are viewed on the Web each month, and though nobody can say how often they are printed out, sites increasingly provide "printer-friendly" versions of their pages formatted for easier reading on paper.

Reviewing this trend a few years ago, the *Economist*, in an article reprinted in the *Australian* in January 1999, recalled that the Starr Report — that scintillating investigation of Bill Clinton's relationship with his intern, Ms Monica Lewinsky — became an instant bestseller as a printed book in the USA even though it was available free on the Net. Why did people shell out good money for material that they could get free? According to the *Economist*: "There are good reasons for this. Some are obvious. Desktop screens must be read sitting up in a fixed position. Even laptop displays are not nearly as portable as paper, and their viewing angles are limited.

"Some other factors are less obvious, such as the contrast, brightness and resolution of text on a screen. Most people think that the text on a reasonable computer is clear enough to be perfectly readable, at least under good conditions. In fact it is not, which is part of the reason why people often choose to read on paper instead. Experiments by John Gould and his colleagues at IBM in the 1980s showed that reading from paper was up to 30 percent faster than reading from screens; that the lower resolution of text on a screen is largely why.

"Expert opinions vary about how sharp a screen needs to be in order to make reading as easy as from paper But the consensus is that a display needs a resolution of

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Next meeting: Tuesday, 3 July 2001

An editorial community on the Internet: The Electric Editors.
Iain Brown speaks: "Who we are, what we offer, and some of the experiences of running a virtual community.
Iain Brown is Lecturer in Electronic Communication and Publishing at University College London where he runs an MA degree looking at theoretical and practical use and availability of electronic information.

Sydney Mechanics' School of Arts, 280 Pitt Street, Sydney (between Park & Bathurst Streets, near the Pilgrim Theatre and Pitt St Uniting Church; the closest train station is Town Hall). 6.30 p.m. for 7.00 p.m. Drinks and light refreshments provided. $12 for members; $15 for non-members and those who don't RSVP; $6 for holders of a current Centrelink or DVA concession card. Please RSVP to 9294 4999 (voicemail) or mmripear@ozemail.com.au (email) by **Monday, 2 July**.

Coming meeting: Tuesday, 7 August — TBA

at least 60 pixels – the tiny dots which make up the picture – per centimetre. That is nearly double the resolution of most screens today and 25 percent more than the very best. Others say at least 80 pixels per cm would be needed to match paper.

"Not only are today's computer screens too fuzzy, they are also the wrong shape. They are designed for watching, not reading; they are descendants of television sets, not books. That is why their displays have a 'landscape' orientation (i.e. they are wider than they are tall). Most printed and written reading materials are portrait-oriented (taller than they are wide).

Experiments in 1997 and 1998 by Stanley Wearden at Kent State University's Information Design

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"People have chosen to make their reading material portrait-shaped for the past 3000 years."

Laboratory showed a strong preference for portrait orientation and for two-page spreads.

"Intriguingly, this preference may reflect more than just that people are used to books. People have chosen to make their reading materials portrait-shaped for the past 3000 years. Even Egyptian hieroglyphics were commonly organised in vertical columns."

The immediate ancestor of today's book is the codex, a pile of pages stitched together, which replaced rolled-up scrolls around the 4th century AD. Codex technology meant a text could be flipped through without laborious unrolling. The upgrade from scrolls to codex was state-of-the-art stuff in its day – a technical advance computers have largely thrown away by demanding that their users return to scrolling.

So there you have the principal reasons to explain why most people read faster on paper than on-screen: screen pages are fuzzy, the wrong shape and have to be scrolled. However, since that article was written two years ago the com-

puter industry has not exactly been sitting on its hands. There have in fact been two notable developments:

Firstly, Microsoft has developed its so-called Microsoft Reader program, which allows you fill your screen with readable type, dispenses with scrolling and features a type face called ClearType, which evens out the type edges on-screen and thus triples the resolution of text on-screen. Its main competitor, Adobe's CoolType achieves much the same result. So both these developments make reading on-screen a much more comfortable experience. ClearType and CoolType were released into the market about a year ago.

Secondly, there has been the development of a nifty little gadget called the E-book Reader, of which there are a number of types. Originally, of course, the term E-books (spelt any way you like) was applied specially formatted digital files of a printed book's contents that could be displayed on, or printed out from, any old computer.

More recently the term E-book has been applied to single-purpose devices whose function is to display reading matter in a book-like fashion. However, to avoid ambiguity, I prefer to call this hardware E-book Readers even though the most popular one's proprietary name is the Rocket E-book, manufactured by NuvoMedia. This went on sale in November 1998. Both the Rocket E-book and its main competitor, the SoftBook, use batteries which have to be periodically recharged. At the moment the number of these dedicated E-book Readers — about 20,000 world-wide — is dwarfed by the 6 million Palm Pilots and similar devices in use but they do represent a serious attempt to provide a better experience than reading off a computer screen.

The most important development recently has been the acquisi-

tion of both NuvoMedia (the manufacturer of the Rocket eBook) and its arch-rival, SoftBook Press, by Rupert Murdoch's company Gemstar International.

At the end of last year it was announced that both these names and devices would disappear to be merged into one company, one device (called an REB) and one technology. Clearly Murdoch is trying to corner the market in E-book Readers; as if that weren't contentious enough he has raised the stakes by making the new device more expensive than its predecessors and pricing E-books themselves at much the same price as paper books, now sometimes referred to as P-books.

However, there is no doubt that some of the earlier difficulties with reading E-books are gradually being conquered and there is some amazing new technology to come. The hottest prospect is the E Ink (Electronic Ink) technology now being developed by the Dutch giant, Royal Philips Electronics. The type of display currently used on laptops, calculators etc is called LCD (Liquid Crystal Display). Liquid crystals are rod-shaped molecules which spiral when they are exposed to an electrical charge. Polarised light passing through the layer of liquid crystal cells is twisted along the spiral path of the molecules. According to Philips, electronic ink offers a paper-like look that provides three main benefits over traditional and emerging display technologies:

The first benefit is Readability. Because it contains the same coloring agents as normal ink and paper, electronic ink is three to six times brighter than reflective LCDs; it exceeds newspapers in contrast ratio and reads easily in both dim light and full sunlight.

Like paper, the E Ink display has a clear image that can be seen at any angle without a change in contrast. In addition, special properties of the ink enable smoother text characters than many displays used today.

The second benefit is Portability. Electronic ink allows a fixed image to remain on the screen even after the power source is shut

off, leading to dramatically longer battery life. When commercialised, electronic ink displays should draw less than 1/1000th the power required by a standard notebook computer screen when used for normal reading. As a result, portable devices incorporating E Ink displays could have far smaller batteries making them less expensive and more portable.

The third benefit of E Ink relates to Ergonomics. Electronic ink displays are expected to be 30 percent thinner and lighter than traditional LCD displays.

Because electronic ink displays read like ink on paper, they should cause less eyestrain than most other displays that typically emit or transmit light.

So how is the phenomenon of the E-book, whether read on-screen or on a special device, being exploited at this time?

Firstly, there is a vast profusion of sites that offer free E-book versions of out-of-copyright texts in lots of different formats. The most famous of these is the Gutenberg Project. Clearly this is ultimately of tremendous benefit to humankind. In particular, it makes the wisdom and culture of the past available in parts of the world poorly serviced by libraries; it makes texts — not only in English but in all languages — available in countries temporarily subjected to tyrannical censorship.

Secondly, mainstream publishers are now hopping on the bandwagon and making some of their new titles available electronically. Publishers and their authors are naturally cautious about copyright protection and pricing in this new medium. At the moment new E-books cost much the same as P-books, but this may not be for all time given that publishing E-books does not involve the normal costs of printing, distribution and retailing. Special E-book reading devices, like the Rocket and its successors, offer the best protection of copyright as their encrypted text is difficult to copy. However, it would be very bold indeed to claim that piracy on them was impossible.

Thirdly, there is a huge and bewildering range of non-mainstream publishing of new E-book titles going on, ranging from vanity- to self-publishing, i.e. ranging from the author paying someone else to digitise their MS and host it on the Web to the author foregoing normal royalties and advances, either accepting no royalty whatsoever or being paid a modern-day version of a share of profits (in fact, just like authors did in the 19th century).

One common thread in all this frenetic activity is an overwhelming desire to dispense altogether with publishing editors. Either through authorial hubris or a desire to save money, the text as written by the author is the text that appears on-screen. If you go to the OzAuthors Website, for example, you will see there a new joint venture between the Australian Society of Authors and a company called IPR Systems Pty Ltd. This site offer Australian authors the opportunity to throw off their shackles and liberate themselves from those pesky publishers for once and for all. www.commonground.com.au is a purely commercial venture along the same lines.

For book publishers themselves, however, the internet provides an

last year, the added promotion had already helped propel one of the earliest eWebScriptions titles, *Ashes of Victory* by David Weber, onto hardcover best-seller lists. But, writes Steve Ditlea, "The power of e-books as a promotional medium has probably best been demonstrated by Melisse Shapiro, who writes under the nom de plume M.J. Rose. Her first novel, *Lip Service*, an erotically charged thriller, was rejected by a dozen book publishers for being too steamy for the chain bookstores. She opted to publish from her own Web site, offering digital downloads for $10 or photocopies of the manuscript for $20. Even when the password for her e-book was stolen and posted online, resulting in 1,000 pirated downloads, she managed to receive 150 paid orders for e-books and 500 orders for photocopies. She invested in printing 3,000 copies to help create buzz; at one point, it was the 123rd best-selling title on Amazon.com.

Following her online blitz, Doubleday Direct picked up *Lip Service* for its mail-order book clubs and soon after, Pocket Books signed up print rights in hardcover

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"One common thread is an overwhelming desire to dispense altogether with publishing editors. Either through authorial hubris or a desire to save money, the text as written by the author is the text that appears on the screen."

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unrivalled opportunity to promote books. Steve Ditlea, in an article last July in *Technology Review*, provided two very innovative examples of how the Net may be used to promote books.

In September 1999, he informs us, veteran science-fiction publisher Jim Baen initiated what he calls eWebScriptions; for $10 a month, visitors to this site may download quarter-of-a-book-sized instalments of four titles about to appear in print. Even after receiving the full text in HTML, "more of our subscribers buy the finished book than don't buy it," says Baen. By March

and paperback." I will come back to this instructive little anecdote later because I truly believe that Melisse Shapiro's experience with her novel *Lip Service* may provide an important paradigm for one kind of future book publishing. But anyhow, you are entitled to ask, where in hell is all this taking us book editors? What kind of future is there for professional book publishing?

Well, there is no doubt that the world of book publishing is now changing very rapidly, even as we talk about it. Jason Epstein has

written a wonderful essay on publishing called "The Rattle of Pebbles" which appeared in the April 27, 2000 issue of the *New York Review of Books*. Epstein is, and was, a distinguished editor and publisher, joining Random House in 1958. Much of his essay, which was later expanded and published as a book titled *Book Business: Publishing Past Present and Future*, is a wonderfully nostalgic evocation of the early post-war glory days of New York publishing when it was still a cottage industry. When I began in publishing I used to visit NY twice a year on visits, attempting to acquire Australian rights on promising American titles; at that time I met Epstein.

I have read this essay and strongly recommend the whole of it to you, and I assume the book, which I have not read, is similarly excellent. However, for an old man Jason Epstein is surprisingly upbeat about the future and about the impact of the Net on books. Perhaps his boldest prediction is this:

<u>That the big-name authors in time will not be published by regular publishers at all.</u>

With considerable passion, Epstein writes: "Such name-brand best-selling authors as Tom Clancy, Michael Crichton, Stephen King, Dean Koontz, and John Grisham, whose faithful readers are addicted to their formulaic melodramas, no

tem is the humungous royalty advances being shelled out by big publishers to these name-brand authors. He writes: "To retain these powerful authors publishers already forego much of their normal profit, or incur severe losses, by paying royalty guarantees far greater than can be recouped from sales. As a result publishers' profits from books by these best-selling authors, if there are any after the unearned portion of the guarantee has been deducted from revenues, often amount to little more than a modest fee for services. Given the negligible value that publishers add to these assured best sellers in today's brand-driven marketplace, these fees are a fair reward."

Epstein reminds us that several name-brand film stars, including Leonardo DiCaprio, Kevin Costner, and Robin Williams, have recently left their agents and hired business managers to create their own production companies rather than sign with studios or independent producers on traditional terms. These celluloid superstars, in a mood not dissimilar to that of brand-name authors, feel they don't need anyone to produce them or to direct them or to show them how to act.

Epstein predicts a day when the publishing conglomerates tire of overpaying the star performers and these writers opt out of the system, hiring independent contractors as production consultants, publicity

technologies will also test the human capacity to distinguish value from a wilderness of choice, but humanity has always faced this dilemma and solved it well enough over time. The World Wide Web offers access to any would-be writer who may or may not have something to say and know how to say it. Several literary Websites that have so far emerged are in effect vanity presses, willing to publish anything, regardless of quality, provided the author pays. It is highly improbable that from this clutter works of value will emerge. But proven talent will coalesce in particular venues as it always has. Distinguished Websites, like good bookstores, will attract readers accordingly."

But my own view is rather different to Epstein's. His belief that nothing of lasting worth will emerge from the cacophony of the Web makes it sound as though publishers are, and always have been, infallible and totally prescient. Nothing, of course, could be further from the truth.

Much rubbish and some really good books will be self-published on the Net. Publishers in the past have been the traditional gatekeepers between all that is written and all that is available to a wider public. That intermediary role will continue in a new way. In time, in my view, a new kind of publisher will arise — one who will, free of charge, introduce Web surfers to the vast universe of new literary works floating around in cyberspace. In return for "discovering" and promoting authors' works that have already been posted on the Web, this new-age publisher will obtain an option to publish such works subsequently in print. Such publishers may themselves post on the Web excerpts from some of the manuscripts they receive, to test on-line reaction, as a kind of poison-tasting. As I mentioned before, the experience of Melisse Shapiro with her novel *Lip Service* may yet provide a useful signpost to the future.

<u>The third significant trend is: From E-books to P-books.</u>

Once upon a time, as you may remember, all books were published

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**"We don't have time to document
all of the known side-effects,
let's jut put the obvious ones in!" Will you say:
"Yes, I'll accept that and edit within those constraints."**

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more need publishers to edit and publicise their books than Nabisco needs Julia Child to improve and publicise Oreos. Name-brand authors need publishers only to print and advertise their books and distribute them to the chains and other mass outlets, routine tasks that all publishers manage equally well."

Epstein believes that the only factor sustaining the current sys-

agencies, and distribution services.

For the record, I agree entirely with Epstein's prediction.

<u>The second important trend for the future is that: There may emerge a new kind of publisher as intermediary between reader and writer.</u>

Jason Epstein understands that cyberspace will be awash with new works and writes: "These new

first in hardback and the most popular of them were offered as paperbacks. Today most books appear at first in paperback and only those offering special commercial prospects appear in hardback. But we are probably moving towards a tomorrow when books will mainly appear initially on-line and then the best of them will later appear in print, and maybe — and this would be the ultimate accolade — sometimes even in hardback.

Some books may be trialled online; others may be excerpted, as with Jim Baen's eWebScriptions project which I've already mentioned. There may also, for example, be subscription sites where for a few dollars a week you get a fresh new poem each morning to inspire you through your day. Short poems are ideally suited to the computer screen. But probably for a long time yet — maybe even forever — the most prestigious way in which an author may dream of being published will be as a printed item.

It may even be that the classics of our times will be printed lovingly using hot-metal type on handmade paper with elaborate end-papers and so on. Once upon a time people only hired videotapes but a library of great films on DVD and handsome printed books may well become the mark of a cultured human being.

The fourth phenomenon to note is The rise of the D-book.

Halfway between the E-book and the printed P-book, the so-called D-book (Digital Book) is rising. I suggest you visit www.dbooks.com.au to see how a local version of this is faring. DBooks, which is located at North Sydney, uses Fuji Xerox digital printers to produce very low print-runs from existing PDF (Adobe's Portable Document Format) files. D-books are printed both sides of the paper and then perfect-bound as a paperback with a full-colour cover. Printing off just a single copy of a 200-page may cost as little as $15; if the print-run is a modest 200, the price comes down to $7-odd per copy. At the moment this technique is being used for micro-reprints or to provide publishers with a small number of

advance copies of a new book before it comes off the big printing presses. However, the future application of this technology is obvious.

In America machines capable of printing and binding digitised texts are already deployed by Ingram and are now being placed in the Barnes and Noble distribution centres and in publishers' warehouses. Jason Epstein in his essay foresees a future in which "less expensive versions can be housed in public libraries, schools and universities, and perhaps even in post offices and other convenient places… where readers can download digitised texts in electronic form or as printed copies, bypassing retail bookstores…Though books manufactured in very small quantities or one at a time by these machines will cost more to produce than factory-made books, their ultimate cost to readers will be less, since publishers' distribution costs and retail markups will not figure in their price. Readers may prefer browsing in bookshops as they may prefer the ambiance of a restaurant to a take-out pizza, but the convenience of these machines in thousands of locations with access to potentially limitless virtual inventories, catalogued, annotated, and searchable electronically, will profoundly affect current book marketing practice, to say nothing of the effect on readers and writers."

I do not quite understand why Epstein foresees these developments as "bypassing retail bookstores"; I suspect, rather, that such new technology will simply transform the traditional bookstore. The capital cost of machines that can spit out instant D-books is certainly declining dramatically. A conference in Melbourne in April on 'Book Production in Transition' was informed that the cost of a high-powered laser colour printer with built-in collating and binding functions capable of producing an entire paperback book in one smooth process has recently dropped from $750,000 to $350,000 per machine.

Nonetheless, this is a substantial outlay and sufficiently high to prevent them sprouting like mushrooms on every street corner. What we are more likely to see is a new type of highly attractive retail out-

let where you can linger and eat, where you can listen to records or browse through old-fashioned printed books or, if you wish, where you can order from the vast inventory of available digitised texts a D-book or two, which may be produced for you while you wait. This is the bookshop of the future, rather than the bookshop bypassed.

The fifth trend worth noting is: The development of Pure on-line publishing

Despite the fact that today we find reading print on paper considerably more comfortable than reading on-line, it would be very foolish and unduly pessimistic to doubt that the on-line reading experience will improve over time.

As this happens the three traditional print media — books, magazines and newspapers — will tend to coalesce.

Ralph Lambruglia, in his contribution to *Atlantic Unbound* last

November, reported that at the eBook World Conference in NY late last year Dick Brass, Microsoft's vice president in charge of electronic books, reiterated that Microsoft is confidently predicting that the last printed edition of The New York Times will appear in the year 2018. Lambruglia writes: "you could feel the thought-wave slither through the room like an eel".

Print newspapers are the most vulnerable to on-line technology because they need to compete with the immediacy of broadcast media. Today's newspapers are already a hybrid of old-fashioned reportage and more contemplative and analytical feature articles. More and more reportage will migrate to on-line distribution. In mid-1999 I and my colleague, David Salter, founded a daily on-line newsletter called the *Zeitgeist Gazette.* It attempted to finance itself through subscriptions only, rather than by advertising income, and, even though it ultimately failed, I suspect it was merely ahead of its times and will prove a prototype for the future.

Clearly reference book publishing is very suited to the Net. In the past readers were asked to outlay large sums of money for a set of printed encyclopedias, but the text was already out of date on Day One and 90 percent of the contents would never be read. On-line publishing allows reference books remain up-to-date at all times and the cost to the reader can be better calibrated to usage. MacquarieNet

um, not a storytelling one, and statistics indicate that during the next few years, education/reference books will do better in electronic form than fiction and other mainstream genres. In a study released last week by Jupiter Media Metrics, the research firm projected that 6 percent of college book sales would be in electronic form by 2005, compared with just 1.5 percent of consumer titles." These, of course, are predictions in the American market.

On-line publishing also comes into its own with specialised titles. Steve Ditlea cites an example of an on-line title called *A Potter's Geology*, which is far too specialised a book for any publisher in a single country. The Web allows those interested in such a title, however thinly dispersed over the planet, to access its text. What Ditlea doesn't mention is an enticing future prospect. Such books have the potential to be published initially in a special kind of basic English that can be instantaneously machine-translated into any one of a number of global languages selected by the prospective reader. Thus a book like *A Potter's Geology* can be available online not merely to the couple of hundred people in each continent who are interested in its contents but in whichever principal language they prefer to read it. While machine translation is still in its infancy, it can in fact be very accurate if the author and editor work within the discipline of a limited and predictable vocabulary

instantaneously by their Common Ground operation as a D-book.

And finally there is the potential Revival of the multimedia book.

Most discussion of E-books these days seems to be text-oriented. Anything too complicated online simply takes too long to download, leading to reader impatience. But we should never forget that there is another kind of non-print book entity. Here is the ever-eloquent Ralph Lambruglia wallowing in a little nostalgia in his December 14 contribution to *Atlantic Unbound*:

"In the early nineties, my wife and I were hired by a small development company…

The result was *A Jack Kerouac ROMnibus*, published by Penguin Electronic in 1995… if a more ambitious 'multimedia illumination' of a full-length literary text has ever been attempted, I'm not aware of it. Hundreds and hundreds of phrases in Kerouac's text were linked to pop-up annotations in various media: photographs of people, places, memorabilia from the author's estate, and pages from his note-books; audio readings of various texts; clips from films; original interviews videotaped for the project. All these years later, it still looks great. Unfortunately, you can't see it, because it's no longer available. When we started the project, no one had ever heard the word Netscape. When we finished it, the word Netscape was everywhere, and before long the World Wide Web helped kill the CD-ROM publishing business and in the process set multimedia production back at least five years." I should add here that I myself was involved peripherally in a similar venture to this all those years ago — an elaborate version of Joseph Banks Journal, published by the State Library of NSW. I think they still have copies in their bookshop if you were interested in seeing it.

Ralph Lambruglia concludes rather sadly: "Most readers never saw the electronic books of the 1990s. That's because serious, well-produced CD-ROMs were too far ahead of their time — too far ahead of the software, the hardware, the

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"Today's newspapers are a hybrid of old-fashioned reportage and analytical feature articles... More and more reportage will migrate to online distribution."

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is a very crude local attempt to achieve this. For a monthly fee subscribers can tap into the whole of the Macquarie Library of books.

A report in the *SMH*'s I.T. section this week on Random House's new digital imprint, AtRandom.comBooks, noted: "Many observers think e-books work best as an information medi-

with a simplified, stripped-down syntax. Michael Singh, Professor of Language and Culture at RMIT, has contributed a fascinating chapter on these possibilities in a volume called *C-2-C* (Creator to Consumer), the proceedings of the Melbourne conference on Australian Book Production in Transition organised by RMIT in April and published

mmm...mentoring – food for thought...

One of the issues raised in general discussion at meetings and through our dialogue with the Australian Society of Authors is that of mentoring.

Members are invited to consider and comment on this issue.

Mentoring and training differ. Mentors often work with people of the same or allied professions who have less understanding of a procedure or skill than the mentor. Negotiation, for instance, is an area where a mentor can help a newcomer understand the set up and the hierarchy of the company and alleviate some of the awkwardness that can come with lack of information. Mentors' experience and expertise can be of assistance to less experienced colleagues.

Would you like to be a mentor? Would you like to be mentored?

Do you have ideas about how the Society might devise and run a mentoring program?

We'd love to hear from you. Please contact any committee member with your ideas.

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Membership
Membership of the Society of Editors (NSW) Inc. is open to anyone working as an editor for publication (print or electronic documents), and anyone who supports the society's aims. Membership runs for a calendar year. Fees for 2001 are $50 (new members; $45 renewals. For an application form, ph (02) 9294 4999, write to PO Box 254, Broadway NSW 2007 or visit the website.

Blue Pencil
The society's newsletter, *Blue Pencil*, is published monthly, except for a combined January–February issue. Your comments and contributions are welcome. Please send any copy for August issue to: teri.brien@au.pwcglobal.com. The deadline for that issue is Monday, 15 July.

Advertising rates
Full page, $90; Half page, $50 (horizontal only); One-third page, $35 (vertical or horizontal); Quarter page, $25 (horizontal only); Sixth page, $20 (half of one column). Inserts: $50 per hundred for DL-sized or A4 prefolded to DL size. Circulation: approx. 300.

Listing in the Editorial Services Directory
Listing costs $40 and is available only to members of the society. The fee covers listing in both print and online versions. The online version is updated every three months. Submit new entries in RTF format, using a template available from Cathy Gray at cgray@mpx.com.au. For existing entries, updates can be made to contact details only. Deadline for the next update is 30 June 2001.

Committee meetings
All members are welcome to attend the society's committee meetings. Contact a committee member for details if you wish to attend the next meeting.

digital economy itself. The general public may well believe 'e-book' to be a brand-new, twenty-first-century idea . . . [but] electronic-multimedia books could indeed become the future of reading, or part of it. Just like they used to be."

Despite every attempt to provide high-speed access to the internet, the information highway may never be as fast as we wish it to be. Just as when we build real motorways they simply seem to encourage more traffic and so their immediate beneficial effect is dissipated, so it may be that, for all the cables that are frenetically being laid, we may never be able to keep up with digital demand. It is not impossible that the CD-ROM may make a comeback and prove as durable as the printed book.

Finally, we should grasp the fact that even the most dyed-in-the-wool Luddite print publisher will use the new technology to lower the cost of books. If magazine and newspaper journalists can edit on-screen, book editors will more and

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"Even the most dyed-in-the-wool luddite will use the new technology to lower the cost of books."

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more have to follow suit, particularly on the more bread-&-butter titles, thus eliminating the cost and slowness of printing out hard copies and paying typesetters to take in the revisions. This process would be immeasurably enhanced if there was a really good Spellcheck software package for the Australian language, a project dear to my own heart and to the company of which I am a director, Techne-Ventures. And so at last we come to a question which may conceivably be of more than passing interest to those of you gathered here on this winter's evening: In all this maelstrom of change, you may well ask, what exactly does the future hold for today's industrious and highly

experienced book editors?

Well, there is good news and there is good news.

Firstly, I think all of us have to accept that the new technology offers a sophisticated and timely solution to the two greatest impediments to modern book reading. The two greatest complaints laid against the book by dedicated readers is that books are now too expensive and too unavailable, meaning by the latter that it is simply too difficult to locate a bookstore that stocks any specific title we are after at that particular moment.

These problems are nobody's fault, as we know, but a direct outcome of over-publication. We are spoilt for choice, which is wonderful given that our interests and tastes are so wide-ranging, but this torrent of titles is its own undoing. Print-runs are shorter, therefore cover prices soar; there are so many new and recently old titles that no bookshop, however large, could ever be expected to stock them all or anticipate from which direction the next surge of demand will arise.

Amazon Books and its imitators have made an important early contribution to book availability but ultimately online technology, via either on-screen texts or advanced E-book reader machines or digital printing on demand, will deliver 100 percent availability of most titles anywhere on the planet at any hour. Apart from being a giant step forward in convenience, consider for a moment the impact of this on world literacy and world enlightenment and rejoice.

The second point to make is that these changes will in time create cheaper books. Today in Australia one of the largest costs publishers have to meet is their writedown of stock; across the whole industry it undoubtedly costs more than $100m. per year to write off stock that ultimately has to be sold at well below its manufactured cost. This, in accounting terms, represents the size of the risk publishers embrace each time they print copies of any book — across all the titles a large publisher produces in any year this cost alone may represent 10–15 percent of the

recommended retail price.

The new technology lowers the investment publishers have to make in printed stock per book and thus it lowers the interest they have

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"There is good news and there is good news

...the new technology offers a sophisticated and timely solution to the two greatest impediments to modern book reading."

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to pay to their banks or shareholders; it lowers the risk they take and thus their writedown costs; it lowers their warehousing costs and their distribution costs. Because it may lower the cost of a bookseller's inventory it may even lower the discount that is appropriate to the retailer.

In time readers can expect not only to see the price of books come down, in relation to other kinds of goods, but also to experience less agonising doubt in choosing which titles to buy. Today our friends recommend a book to us as a must-read; on the other hand, we may have read some reviews of this particular book which are equivocal — we hesitate in purchasing it because we fear disappointment. Reading an excerpt on the Web can be much more reassuring that sneaking a quick squiz in a bookshop.

To be able to buy what we want, when we want, at a more manageable price and with greater certainty of reader satisfaction — this represents a giant step forward in anybody's language. Particularly in a world where newspaper reading is declining and where — in relation to one traditionally important sector of book readership — there is an ever-swelling population of retired people who are going to enjoy good health and good eyesight for many decades to come.

Now, as publishing professionals, you are entitled to feel a little aggrieved that there are going to be plenty of literary and unliterary works flying around cyberspace

that have never experienced the gentle and caring touch of a publishing editor. But it doesn't pay for you to get too excited about that. In our personal lives we long ago have had to get used to the fact that our friends — even our writer friends — sometimes send us letters, and these days e-mail, that surprise us with their carelessness and almost illiteracy. All you can do is grit your teeth, shrug your shoulders and get on with your life.

I have mentioned previously a D-book called *C-2-C*, which was produced in April, reproducing the papers presented at a Melbourne conference on Australian Book Production in Transition. This was published by Common Ground, a publishing endeavour associated with RMIT and specifically its Faculty of Art Design and Communication. Not a bad provenance, you might be forgiven for thinking; and indeed its contents are very stimulating indeed. But as a piece of professional publishing it's a joke. It's in very great need of good subbing and competent proof-reading; its index, no doubt produced by a computer, is almost useless.

The view of the future promoted by the text of *C-2-C* is superficially seductive for authors — it suggests that, through a reduction in printing and publishing costs, authors may now hope for larger royalties than they have ever previously dreamed of. Of course, the folk from Common Ground are talking about royalty rates — these people seem to be mildly innumerate in not understanding that a professional writer is ultimately more concerned with total income than royalty rates. After all, it's a triumph if authors get a 25 percent royalty but somewhat of a pyrrhic victory if they only manage to sell 500 copies.

The world we are entering is going to be even more intensely competitive for authors than the world that preceded it. In the past it's been only a minor achievement to write a book; the real achievement has been getting it published. Now we have a situation where getting published is only a minor achievement but to gain wider recognition and a significant read-

ership will certainly take more skill than the mere capacity to digitise text. To be properly edited and professionally indexed and marketed — these are the kinds of cutting-edge advantages few professional writers will want to sacrifice.

In the last decade there has been a marked increase in the activities of literary agents in trade publishing — it is estimated that today 90 percent of general books issued by major publishers come to them via agents. Clearly, from what I have said, I see the conventional roles of publishers and agents

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"… it's been only a minor achievement to write a book; the real achievement has been getting it published."

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merging. Editors will work for these new entities as they have traditionally done — encouraging authors, assessing new clients, preparing material for publication. Some manuscripts may well at first be test-driven on the internet in an unedited form but, having evoked a positive response there, they may then need to be professionally edited and prepared for their next step up the literary chain, as a D-book or an offset-printed P-book.

Ideas expressed in written words will continue to be the most significant way of analysing and arguing about the great social and political issues of the day. However, the border between writers and editors and polishers and checkers and researchers will over time blur. Material that is published and produced by the famous "Jo Smith", in whatever medium, may well be the output of six or eight writers or editors, in the same way as daily gossip columns are produced — in the language of Renaissance art, such material may come from the studio of Jo Smith.

Once upon a time ideas expressed in written words were almost exclusively the province of the print media. Give or take a bit of graffiti and some other minor exceptions, there was simply no other way of written words reaching out to people. But we now need

a new way of describing even this notion because no longer is it true to say that ideas expressed in written words must of necessity appear as print on paper.

The new technology brings with it the promise of more reading, not less. Yes, more unedited manuscripts on the Web but also, when it matters, more material to be professionally edited and marketed and published than ever before.

As always throughout human history, we cannot fight technological progress, we must instead use our best efforts to harness it to our greatest advantage. But never forget this. For the media the big story of the 20th Century was the creation of film and broadcast media. But to enjoy radio, to enjoy movies, to enjoy TV you did not need to be able to read or write — literacy may at times help you enjoy those media but it is not strictly necessary. However, right at the very end of the 20th Century, along came the internet. It is virtually impossible to use the internet without being able to read or write. Indeed, the popularity of the PC has meant that more people — yes,

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"The Internet is literacy striking back."

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even men — know their way around a keyboard. The internet is literacy striking back.

As literate folk you should celebrate this remarkable, dramatic and recent change. Somewhere in all this rapid, dazzling and sometimes confusing evolution of mass literacy there is certain to be an exciting role for those who love language and value knowledge, and want to share that love with other readers.

Your Committee — volunteers needed...

BP Editor
We have new members of the BP team! Our new BP Editor is Teri Brien... Josie Evans will be a new BP assistant. Irene Sharpham is still on board, helping with proofing; Carolyn Bruyn is still valiantly transcribing the talks and will be joined in this task by Georgina Frampton. Heather Jamieson will become a general committee member from her on, though has been a fantastic BP editorial assistant and our thanks go to her. The committee would like to say a very big thank you to all the people who offered help and showed interest in getting the newsletter out to members.

Web Coordinator
Unfortunately, Carolyn Uyeda can no longer take on this task. We are really grateful for the terrific input she's had so far — particularly the E-savvy column — and hope there's someone out there who would be happy to take over...
Marketing Coordinator/Catering officer
Positions still vacant.

...over to you...flood us with responses...

July workshop

Beyond Grammar
with Michael Lewis

Saturday 7 July, 9am-5pm
Coles Seminar Room
State Library
$95 members; $120 non-members
(includes lunch, teas)

Enquiries (not bookings) to
Pauline Waugh
paulinewaugh@ozemail.com.au
ph: 0414 682 644

eSavvy

Scones... with gravy?

by *Carolyn Uyeda*
Suppose you're editing a web product targeting an international audience. Your brief is that the English has to be understood, at the very least, by American and British visitors to the site. You can probably imagine the confusion an editor must sort out, given that words can differ in meaning from country to country.

Take, for example, ordering an entrée in a restaurant in America — to your astonishment, the waiter brings out a main course. Later, when you order a biscuit with your coffee — you're served a scone… perhaps with gravy. Then, the weather turns cool, so you enter a shop and ask to see some jumpers — and they show you pinafore dresses (this could be a rather amusing situation if you happen to be a man).

I regularly found such sources of potential confusion in the material I was editing. Fortunately, I was able to find some websites to refer to when in doubt. Here are a few of my favourites:

• **WWlib — Notes on American English**
www.scit.wlv.ac.uk/~jphb/american.html
This site lists over 300 American and Canadian terms, along with their British equivalents and an explanation of common differences in usage.

• **Collins CobuildDirect Corpus Sampler**
http://titania.cobuild.collins.co.uk/form.html
You can enter an expression and search for American or British usage (or both). The search is conducted through a selection of 1) British books, ephemera, radio, newspapers, magazines; 2) British transcribed speech; and 3) American books, ephemera and radio.

When using such resources it's advisable to double check your findings with one or more native speakers from the country in question. To this end, the copyeditors' email list (see http://listserv.indiana.edu/) may be useful when checking American terms.

I came across the next site while checking a script, which referred to someone driving on a certain side of the road in a particular South American country.

• Which side of the road do they drive on? www.travel-library.com/general/driving/drive_which_side.html

So, the next time you need to check the side of the road people drive on in Surinam or Myanmar, give this site a try. It lists the status of over 200 countries, comments on border crossings, gives historical insights and population distributions, among other "which side of the road" trivia.

Finally, for your entertainment, here's a quiz! Provide the Australian equivalents for the following common American terms. *Answers to be provided in the next BP.*

American term	Australian equiv.	American term	Australian equiv.
barette		pacifier	
baseboard		pound sign	
bathrobe		purse	
body shop		rotary (n)	
chicory		scallion	
cilantro		snap (n)	
comforter		suspenders	
concession stand		Swiss chard	
district attorney		tic tac toe	
fender (n)		tractor-trailer	
looney (n) (Canada)		two bits	