

From the Editors

We find ourselves in something of a transition period in the brave new world of electronic publishing. As with other transitions with which we are familiar, however, it is more evident where we are coming from than where we are going. The fact is, economic constraints have greatly affected academic publishing in recent years and the new technology of the Internet has not really changed anything fundamentally—yet. Rising costs and other pressures, real and perceived, have dictated that monographs and journal articles be shorter; while we all know that more concise is sometimes better, it is not always so in the realm of fundamental research, especially in the midst of an “archival revolution.” This basic trend seriously affects much academic work, as articles and books increasingly take on the guise of scholarly sound bites. *Kritika*, for one, continues to offer an outlet for longer, more in-depth articles; and we continue to maintain that one size does not fit all when it comes to articles. But rising costs and, equally important, beliefs and attitudes about the bottom line among academic publishers have also affected the topics and style of academic research. In our “market” the goods are often sexed up to make them more publishable. Essential but often stolid genres like source criticism, historiography, and a range of less-than-glamorous subfields—never overly popular in an environment in which the culture of celebrity easily penetrates the ivory tower—suffer even more. The Internet has the potential to lift space constraints and provide new electronic publishing outlets, and in the long term may solve academic publishing’s crisis. But how will it do so, and, more important, how will it change the forms and methods of scholarship? In this transition period questions can be posed, but the answers are not at all certain.

As *Kritika* prepares to celebrate its fifth birthday at the end of 2004, however, a number of significant developments have occurred that bring the integration of electronic components into our scholarship closer. Many more journals have gone online with electronic versions, as *Kritika* did after its second volume with Project MUSE of Johns Hopkins University Press. A number of important discussions about how e-publishing will and should affect historical scholarship have occurred, including imaginative interventions by Robert Darnton, the historian of printing and the press during the French Revolution.^[1] The editor of *The American Historical Review*, Michael Grossberg, has emerged as a strong proponent of electronic publishing; and readers of that journal have recently been treated, through the debut of e-AHR, to the first of a series of fully electronic articles that integrate maps, charts, documents, historiographical excerpts, and hyperlinks. The authors of this applied innovation clearly also aspire to build a model for future efforts in the area.^[2]

Yet how many scholars or readers of this journal have been following the discussions about the future forms of scholarship or, more to the point, are preparing to add an electronic dimension to their scholarship the next time they sit down to write an article or review essay? Our guess is, very few. While new forms of dissemination are already with us and beginning to change the future face of scholarly work, the majority of practicing historians and scholars in the field remain little more than bystanders. The new-model e-articles, moreover, seem at once to demand a team of computer specialists, journals with great resources, and scholars with a good deal of Internet expertise. In short, important discussions and examples of e-scholarship are emerging, possibly setting important precedents for the future, while the vast majority of scholars proceed as they have before. It is a paradoxical transition indeed.

In this context we believe this journal has a contribution to make, and we propose to make it starting with volume 6. We feel that adding a modest, phased-in electronic component to the everyday scholarship of our publications may well turn out to be a more far-reaching step than sponsoring razzle-dazzle, showcase examples of fully electronic articles. If there are space constraints that make data, primary documents, special historiographic or source-critical exegeses, or visual components difficult to publish in the print version, we will try to publish them on our website and create a link in the electronic version of the journal available on Project MUSE. Further, we plan to sponsor a new, interactive forum of questions and answers in which authors of pieces that promise to elicit important discussions can field questions from our audience by e-mail after publication in the print version of the journal. Later, the transcript of the questions and answers will be linked to the electronic version. This will allow our readers to respond in a new, direct, and alternative way to our authors, forming an archived amplification of our publications from which future readers can profit. Examples of similar online sessions in the e-AHR have in our view been especially successful and have elicited participation from readers around the world.[\[3\]](#)

We believe it is important that the challenge of e-publishing in this journal not be met merely “from above,” as it were, by the editors; new ways of crafting the scholarly forms of the future will be better evolved with the direct input of a wide range of practicing scholars in the field. Will far-greater involvement in post-World War II history, with its vastly expanded source base, lead to a resurgence of “social science history” for which electronic media can form an especially useful vehicle? How will we be prompted to incorporate “visual history” more directly into our everyday historical scholarship? Can “regional studies,” with their sources in foreign languages, many of them from the recently opened but often impoverished archives of the former Soviet Union, take advantage of the chance to include key documentary evidence for historical scholarship in electronic form? We ask our authors to propose their own ideas for incorporating electronic dimensions into their publications in *Kritika* and invite methodological reflections on the future forms of Russian and Eurasian historical scholarship to be submitted for publication in our pages—and on our screens.

It is with immense sadness that we mark the sudden death of Reginald Zelnik, Professor of History at the University of California, Berkeley, and a member of the *Kritika* editorial board. Reggie died in an accident on the Berkeley campus on 17 May 2004. One of the leading historians of imperial Russia, Reggie was a pioneer in the study of the workers’ movement and workers’ identities. In addition to his own research, he mentored generations of students, many of whom went on to become leading figures in the field in their own right. He was remarkably generous with his time and wisdom to any and all who approached him, managing to provide commentary and criticism always tempered with encouragement and warmth. In remembering him, we recall especially his intellectual rigor, his political engagement, and his warmth and good humor. In due course *Kritika* will be publishing a full-length obituary. Here we note his passing and our sorrow. He will be sorely missed.

Footnotes

[1] Robert Darnton, "The New Age of the Book," *New York Review of Books* 46, 5 (18 March 1999), 5–7; see also *Journal of the Association for History and Computing*, published since 1998.

[2] William G. Thomas, III, and Edward L. Ayers, "The Differences Slavery Made: A Close Analysis of Two American Communities," *American Historical Review* 108, 5 (2003), available at www.historycooperative.org/ahr, with a short overview in the print version of the journal, 1299–1307.

[3] Among the most interesting have been Charles Maier, "Consigning the Twentieth Century to History: Alternative Narratives for the Modern Era," *American Historical Review* 105, 3 (2000): 806–31, with the online discussion at www.historycooperative.org/phorum/list.php?f=10; Roy Rosenzweig, "Scarcity or Abundance: Preserving the Past in a Digital Era," *American Historical Review* 108, 3 (2003): 735–62, with the online discussion at www.historycooperative.org/phorum/list.php?f=14. A number of similar electronic projects can be found at www.historycooperative.org/ahr/elec-projects.html.