

Book Review: Revisiting CyberReader

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Victor J. Vitanza (2005). *CyberReader (Abridged Edition)*. New York: Longman. 256 pp.
\$20.00. (paperback, 0-321-27249-8).

The 2005 abridged version of Victor J. Vitanza's *CyberReader* continues the discussion on new technologies that he began with his original, unabridged edition in 1996. Today, however, the "new" technologies are not so new anymore, but the dialogue on them continues – and rightly so. Vitanza observes that when he published the first edition of his book, the Internet was considered a wild west that became "civilized and commercialized," ultimately, by entrepreneurs. Less than ten years later, questions surrounding identity and subjectivity, pornography, digital piracy and intellectual property, as well as class, race, and gender issues, have yet to be resolved. As Vitanza ponders early on in *CyberReader*: Are the Net and Web potentially even wilder than we have yet to realize?

Vitanza breaks down the 2005 *CyberReader* into five distinctive chapters: "Cyberspace and Virtual Reality," "Virtual Identities," "Sexual-Racial Politics," "Digital Piracy (Hackers/Crackers, Intellectual Property)," and "Retrospection (A Look Back to the Future, Cartoonish Views)." He revisits some of the same prominent academic writers that were included in his 1996 edition, including Benjamin Woolley's "Cyberspace," Sherry Turkle's "Identity Crisis," and Allucquère Rosanne Stone's *In Novel Conditions: The Cross-Dressing Psychiatrist*, as well as more recent pieces on digital piracy from the *New York Times Magazine*. Vitanza, however, does not limit his offerings to scholarly and mainstream publications only. John Perry Barlow's "Crime and Puzzlement" from *Whole Earth Review*, Timothy Leary's

musings on cyberpunks, and Julian Dibbell's controversial 1993 "A Rape in Cyberspace" from the *Village Voice* also are included. Interestingly, Vitanza closes *CyberReader* with a "Dear Abby" letter (and Dear Abby's alleged response) from a reader who is fearful that her husband is cheating on her in the virtual world and, finally, several cartoons that poke fun at so-called computer geeks, kiddie hackers, and middle-aged hippies pirating MP3 files. Both the "Dear Abby" letter and the cartoons lend themselves to questions of reality and virtuality. For example, are those "Dear Abby" letters, indeed, *real*? And, even if the letter from the frantic wife is real, what constitutes *real* adultery?

Geared toward college freshman writing courses, Vitanza's *CyberReader* poses a series of questions after each article that invite the student to step outside preconceived notions of the Internet and go beyond the mundane world of AOL instant messaging, eBay.com, and netiquette. One of the underlying themes of these questions is stressing to readers that they need to have a broad base of knowledge from which they are operating if they are to fully understand the texts they encounter. For example, after "Identity Crisis," Vitanza asks students what is meant by some of the terminology used in Turkle's article. What is "Cog" and why does Turkle mention it? Following Richard Thieme's "Stalking the UFO Meme," Vitanza asks, "What is it that you have to know to understand what someone is saying?" He proceeds with a long list of references used in Thieme's article (e.g., Roswell, Carl Jung, and Watergate), suggesting that if readers are not familiar with these terms, they may miss the whole point of Thieme's discussion. Another question deals with Timothy Leary, the "turn on, tune in, drop out" countercultural '60s icon, and his article, "The Cyberpunk: The Individual as Reality Pilot." Would a student's awareness of Leary's background alter that student's reading of the article?

In today's K-12 world of standardized exams, No Child Left Behind, and the resulting "teaching to the test" with little to no emphasis on critique, Vitanza's *CyberReader* encourages critical reading and thinking skills by inviting college students to not read and regurgitate but, instead, to interact with (and question) the text.

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