

erential language—an inability that leaves them blind to the role language itself plays in the organization of reality. In contrast, poststructuralists presuppose the primacy of language in the formation of consciousness, and it is their concepts that Poster subsequently employs to analyze the cultural significance of different types of electronic communications.

These later chapters concentrate, in fact, on rather routine elements of postindustrial life and are the book's most engaging. Particularly provocative is Poster's treatment of TV ads, which uses Jean Baudrillard's political economy of the sign to argue that television commercials establish "a new linguistic and communications reality." Emphasizing their imaginative splicing of different semantic and visual codes, Poster shows how ads sever words from conventional associations to create a hyperreality of free-floating signifiers that "promises a new level of self-constitution, one beyond the rigidities and restraints of fixed identity." But while boldly proclaiming the liberational dimension of TV ads, Poster also acknowledges their enhanced power of social control, which "makes possible the subordination of the individual to manipulative communications practices."

A similar ambivalence governs Poster's discussion of databases, which proceeds under the rubric of Michel Foucault's twin concepts of surveillance and discipline. On the one hand, because databases are free from the spatio-temporal coordinates of speech and writing, they constitute a new language formation that undermines traditional modes of cultural discipline. On the other hand, the "structure or grammar" of digital computers is so rigidly nonambiguous that it produces "an impoverished, limited language that uses the norm to constitute individuals and define deviants." From this latter perspective, databases appear not as the avant-garde of a utopian democracy of free and abundant information, but as a sinister tool of reactionary surveillance. This dual perspective is also present in the two concluding chapters, which invoke Jacques Derrida on computer writing (including both word processing and electronic mail) and Jean Lyotard on computer science.

For librarians, Poster's book is especially valuable for the reflection it encourages about the electronic instruments so important to our professional lives. Most often, we regard computers as passive tools of our ambitions to serve patrons more efficiently and effectively. Poster enables us to understand that these machines are also active forces in our cultural environment, which are subtly but profoundly reshaping us in their own image. Sensitivity to this fundamental fact of cybernetic reality is, perhaps, no less urgent than mastering a new set of commands for the latest database.—William McPheron, *Stanford University, Stanford, California.*

Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: Preservers of Black History. Ed. by Elinor Des Verney Sinnette, W. Paul Coates and Thomas C. Battle. Washington, D.C.: Howard Univ. Pr., 1990. 236p. (ISBN 8-88258-031-0). LC 90-4458.

Like so many facets of black history, black bibliography and book collecting have been neglected areas in American intellectual history. *Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: Preservers of Black History* is one of the recently published books that attempts to remedy this deficiency.

This collection of essays and commentaries was originally presented at Black Bibliophiles and Collectors: A National Symposium, a 1983 conference held at Howard University. Grouped under nine topics treating various aspects of collecting and organizing black materials, the fifteen essays and commentaries by established black scholars, bibliophiles, and librarians are uneven in quality. Many present little new information to anyone familiar with black collections and black scholarship. Some essays, however, will reward even the seasoned practitioner. Together, they provide a useful introduction for the novice to the subject, making the book an essential purchase for library school libraries.

The venerable Dorothy Porter Wesley's encyclopedic contribution "Black Antiquarians and Bibliophiles Revisited, with a Glance at Today's Lovers of Books," is a fascinating and informative discussion of black collectors from the early nineteenth century to the present. In this peripatetic

excursion into the history of collecting black materials, Porter unearths the collecting activities of such unlikely individuals as antebellum black Philadelphia janitor Joseph Cathcart and Assistant Librarian of Congress Daniel Alexander Murray, as well as today's younger black collectors.

Collector and curator Charles L. Blockson's "Black Giants in Bindings" is an intriguing autobiographical commentary on his quest as a collector. Likewise, fellow book collector Clarence Holte recounts his experiences in "Incidental Adventures in Collecting Books." The book's contributors should be urged to expand their essays into full-length books.

"The Robeson Collections: Windows on Black History," by Paul Robeson, Jr., is one of the most significant essays in the collection. The richness and breadth of this important archive are critically assessed in Robeson's astute description of its varied contents. Housed in Howard University's Moorland-Spingarn Research Center, this collection "marks one of the most significant milestones in the historical documentation of black Americans."

Black Bibliophiles and Collectors is an important addition to Afro-American bibliography and history and American intellectual history. It is unfortunate, however, that this work focuses primarily on collectors and collections in the eastern section of the United States. Among the important black collections hardly mentioned are Tuskegee University's Historical Collection, Chicago Public Library's Vivian G. Harsh Collection of Afro-American History and Literature, and Detroit Public Library's Azalia Hackley Collection. Also regrettable is the omission of such collectors as Monroe Work, Vivian G. Harsh, Era Bell Thompson, and Claude Barnett.—*Donald Franklin Joyce, Austin Peay State University, Clarksville, Tennessee.*

The Culture of Print: Power and the Uses of Print in Early Modern Europe. Ed. by Roger Chartier. Trans. by Lydia G. Cochrane. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1989. 351p. \$45 (ISBN 0-691-05580-7). LC 89-4043.

These nine essays—first published in Paris in 1987 as *Les Usages de l'imprimé*, in

the series *Nouvelles études historiques*—originated in seminars at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Chief responsibility for the collective work lies with Roger Chartier, director of studies at the EHESS, who contributed two of the essays in addition to serving as editor and providing a general introduction to "print culture."

Traditionally, print culture—beginning with Gutenberg's invention of printing from movable type—has been characterized by the mass production of single texts, often to be read in private by literate individuals. Here, the six essayists expand this culture's boundaries to include printed objects that had public uses in early modern Europe and, through combination with visual images, brought print culture even to those who could not read. As Chartier explains in his introduction, their method is to favor items that are not books or tracts, to stress "particularity over preconceived generalization" by intensive study of single items or well-defined small groups of items, and to investigate thoroughly "the precise, local, specific context that alone gave them meaning."

Nine case studies cover text-plus-image in such disparate subjects as Perrault fairy tales, Books of Hours in the later Middle Ages, heretical writings in eighteenth-century Bohemia, and various genres from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century France (including political handbills, religious pamphlets, contemporary events, marriage charters, and emblem books). These studies achieve unity through their analytical method: the provision of a wealth of evidence as to how texts were tailored for particular publics, how texts were read or otherwise received, and how they relate to the oral traditions out of which many grew. Emphasizing the graphic image as a way into the text, each essay explores the popularization of printed materials and argues that print culture in the fifteenth to early nineteenth centuries was more complex and pervasive—with multiple audiences and multiple uses—than had previously been supposed.