



REVIEWS



Publishing in a Global Village: A Role for the Small Press

by **William M. Brinton**

San Francisco: Mercury House, 1987.

When I first glanced at William Brinton's book, I had every intention of writing a favourable review. After all, I agree with the major premise of the book; namely, that the ready availability of increasingly affordable computer technology allows for the possibility of a strengthened and financially healthy small press. Unfortunately, *Publishing in a Global Village* does not lend itself to favourable review. It is poorly written, badly edited, and full of typographical errors. There are many misspelled words, and numerous quotations are opened and never closed. As well, the text is littered with extraneous words and obvious instances where words have been accidentally omitted. There is no index, which makes the book unsuitable for reference purposes. The table of contents lacks any indication of where the chapters begin, thereby again drastically reducing the book's usefulness to the reader. As a first draft, it shows promise. As a book, it is a dismal failure.

This failure is indeed ironic, as the book is itself a product of the San Francisco-based Mercury House, a small, independent, computerized press headed by Brinton. As a consequence of all the glaring technical and editing deficiencies, form undercuts content; while Brinton argues for the vitality of independent publishing, the book stands as a testimony to the failure of the small press. Brinton states that he "empathize(s) with all authors, particularly those who have something to say but can't get published." Of course, the small press can and should offer a forum for controversial ideas that the mainstream publishers won't touch; however, small presses must at the same time ensure that the quality of their output matches that of the industry giants with whom they compete. Unfortunately, the amateur efforts of Brinton only serve to discredit the reputation of all small presses.

As Brinton argues, small presses can benefit from cheap computer technology; everything from typesetting to editing takes less time and money when computerized. He points out that

while the publishing giants exercise a great deal of power over what gets published, each year small presses in the United States produce over 50 percent of all new titles. This means that small publishing houses together represent a large contribution to our literary heritage. While Brinton expresses the benefits to society of such decentralized, local presses in a typically capitalistic way—"...the free exchange of ideas in the market place is still the best test of truth"—his point is well-taken. The computer now allows for community control of print, a development which must be seen as empowering people's lives. No longer is the production of a newspaper, magazine or book outside the reach of the majority of the population. What we are witnessing is the democratizing (in the original sense of the word) of print. Brinton in fact underestimates the importance of such a revolution with his simplistic "competition of ideas in the marketplace" formulation. It is by increasing people's control over their own lives that the computerized small press is today so important.

The tasks a computer can perform for the small press are endless: editing, spelling correction, typesetting, indexing and accounting are but a few. Not only does Brinton outline the publishing end of producing a book, he also looks at how computers can benefit the whole interlocking system of wholesalers, distributors, bookstores and, finally, consumers. As Brinton points out, anyone who is involved in the production, distribution or sale of books can save a large amount of money by investing in a computer, printer, communications equipment and software. Programs such as Ventura Publisher allow for the production of camera-ready text, while word processors like Microsoft Word provide for easy text editing and spelling correction. Brinton is quite correct in his argument that the use of such technology makes independent publishing an economically sound business. The technology is changing so quickly, in fact, that Brinton's 1987 estimate of US \$52,000 to fully computerize a small operation is, today, too high. Currently, it would be possible for a small press to buy the needed equipment for no more than CAN \$25,000. Consequently, the arguments Brinton makes in favour of a computer-based publishing are even more compelling today, just one year after *Publishing in a Global Village* was published.

Before taking up publishing, Brinton spent 39

years practising law in California—and it shows. He frequently uses legal terms and concepts that are unfamiliar to anyone not involved in the legal profession. He includes long transcriptions of American court cases which deal with the freedom of the press and state control over expression, but these are not coherently analyzed. Brinton's lack of clear reasoning is unfortunate as the issues are important everywhere; for instance, the Conservative party's proposed "anti-pornography" Bill C-54 places limits on the freedom of expression of Canadians.

Brinton's writing is confused and obtuse, with legal arguments thrown in haphazardly and without purpose. In fact, there are times when it is impossible to discern Brinton's own point of view amidst the myriad of quoted court cases and judgements. His obsession with intricate points of law misses the mark. While the judiciary may attempt to legislate the "truth" and thereby force it onto the people, it is rather in the streets, in the resistance of people to such regulation, that truth is at least momentarily achieved. The fact that computer technology is making such resistance even more possible for an ever-increasing number of people is unfortunately lost on Brinton.

In Toronto alone, over 25 "underground" publications and journals are produced by activists and artists, each challenging the right of corporations and courts to define who we are and what we read. Not all of them rely on computers; some are even opposed to the use of high technology. Computers are, however, becoming more common in the underground. Their use by these small publications often means the difference between publishing and going under. The fact that a computer system costs so little allows these groups to be truly independent—they can publish what they want without fear of reprisal from advertisers and the like. It also allows for a decentralized movement—which is, of course, difficult, if not impossible, to suppress. This is a strength of "desktop publishing" that Brinton, with all his legalese, does not appreciate.

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Hollywood from Vice
by **Robin Wood**
New York: Columbia
1986, 328 pp.

Robin Wood's *Hollywood from Vice* is a brilliant and... I'm sure the infu... Wood takes films seri... erable interpretative sk... a fine art.

What's critical for... ary theorists is his w... a close textual analys... interpretations. Using... lenging, if at times i... also does a lot to shake... porary film theory. Hi... homosexual subtext"... many films of the 198... radical reevaluations.

Wood's critical foc... centres on what he c... These are films th... intelligence...at work i... degree of involvement... [yet] ultimately, they... what they want to say

The interest in the... Beginning with *Cahie*... 1969 article, "Cinema... looking back to Marx'... Lenin to Tolstoy, criti... the merits of works t... ambiguous manner w... ogy. Wood broadens... looking well beyond t... order to investigate se... films of our era. W... worked on Ford's *Ye*... turns to such B films... *Dead*.

The most challeng... take on horror films... politics of Martin Sc... Michael Cimino's *De*... tion of three films r... *Cruising*, *Taxi Driver*... bar. In a remarkable... turn the critical tide o