

MULTIPLE CHOICE

Sven Birkerts, *Into the Electronic Millenium*

The order of print is linear, and is bound to logic by the imperatives of syntax. Syntax is the substructure of discourse, a mapping of the ways that the mind makes sense through language. Print communication requires the active engagement of the reader's attention, for reading is fundamentally an act of translation. Symbols are turned into their verbal referents and these are in turn interpreted. The print engagement is essentially private. While it does represent an act of communication, the contents pass from the privacy of the sender to the privacy of the receiver. Print also posits a time axis; the turning of pages, not to mention the vertical descent down the page, is a forward-moving succession, with earlier contents at every point serving as a ground for what follows. Moreover, the printed material is static — it is the reader, not the book, that moves forward. The physical arrangements of print are in accord with our traditional sense of history. Materials are layered; they lend themselves to rereading and to sustained attention. The pace of reading is variable, with progress determined by the reader's focus and comprehension.

The electronic order is in most ways opposite. Information and contents do not simply move from one private space to another, but they travel along a network. Engagement is intrinsically public, taking place within a circuit of larger connectedness. The vast resources of the network are always there, potential, even if they do not impinge on the immediate communication. Electronic communication can be passive, as with television watching, or interactive, as with computers. Contents, unless they are printed out (at which point they become part of the static order of print) are felt to be evanescent. They can be changed or deleted with the stroke of a key. With visual media (television, projected graphs, highlighted "bullets") impression and image take precedence over logic and concept, and detail and linear sequentiality are sacrificed. The pace is rapid, driven by jump-cut increments, and the basic movement is laterally associative rather than vertically cumulative. The presentation structures the reception and, in time, the expectation about how information is organized.

Further, the visual and nonvisual technology in every way encourages in the user a heightened and ever-changing awareness of the present. It works against historical perception, which must depend on the inimical notions of logic and sequential succession. If the print medium exalts the word, fixing it into permanence, the electronic counterpart reduces it to a signal, a means to an end.

Transitions like the one from print to electronic media do not take place without rippling or, more likely, *reweaving* the entire social and cultural web. The tendencies outlined above are already at work. We don't need to look far to find their effects. We can begin with the newspaper headlines and the millennial lamentations sounded in the op-ed pages: that our educational systems are in decline; that our students are less and less able to read and comprehend their required texts, and that their aptitude scores have leveled off well below those of previous generations. Tag-line communication, called "bite-speak" by some, is destroying the last remnants of political discourse; spin doctors and media consultants are our new shamans. As communications empires fight for control of all information outlets, including publishers, the latter have succumbed to the tyranny of the bottom line; they are less and less willing to publish work, however worthy, that will not make a tidy profit. And, on every front, funding for the arts is being cut while the arts themselves appear to be suffering a deep crisis of relevance. And so on.

Every one of these developments is, of course, overdetermined, but there can be no doubt that they are connected, perhaps profoundly, to the transition that is underway.

1. The author's tone in the passage as a whole is best described as
 - a. provocative and belligerent
 - b. allegorical and understated
 - c. analytical and manic
 - d. pessimistic and vague
 - e. discerning and methodical

2. In lines 7–14, the author uses an extended analogy between
 - a. communication and syntax
 - b. privacy and language
 - c. history and printed books
 - d. progress and attention
 - e. sender and receiver

3. Lines 15–20 (“Information and contents . . . or interactive, as with computers”) contain which of the following?
 - a. extended metaphor
 - b. subordinate clauses
 - c. parallel syntax
 - d. correlative conjunction
 - e. simple sentence

4. In context, the word “evanescent” (line 22) is best interpreted to mean
 - a. transitory
 - b. cherubic
 - c. enduring
 - d. interminable
 - e. paradoxical

5. In the sentence beginning “The pace is rapid” (lines 25–26), the author employs all of the following EXCEPT
 - a. parallel syntax
 - b. juxtaposition
 - c. diction
 - d. colloquialism
 - e. jargon

6. In context, the word “inimical” (line 30) is best interpreted to mean
 - a. unifying
 - b. occluded
 - c. ambiguous
 - d. detrimental
 - e. intrinsic

7. The primary rhetorical function of lines 28–31 is to
 - a. provide evidence to contrast with that supplied in paragraph 2 (lines 15–27)
 - b. provide support for claims supplied in lines 11–15
 - c. anticipate objections raised by the ideas presented in lines 25–27
 - d. present a thesis that will be challenged in paragraph 4 (lines 33–46)
 - e. introduce a series of deliberate exaggerations that are supported in the previous two

8. Which of the following statements best describes the author's discussion in paragraph 4 (lines 33–46)?

- I. Educational systems are suffering because of students' lack of access to electronic texts.
- II. Newspapers are in decline due to public access to new, electronic information outlets.
- III. Electronic communication hinders creativity and originality in the publishing industry.

- a. I only
- b. II only
- c. III only
- d. II and III only
- e. I, II, and III

9. The structure of paragraph 4 (lines 33–46) is best described as

- a. a thesis followed by a series of sweeping generalizations
- b. a counterargument followed by objections
- c. personal anecdotes leading to commentary
- d. an exaggeration followed by a series of abstract examples
- e. a claim supported by factual dissemination

10. The principal contrast employed by the author in this passage is between

- a. reading and entertainment
- b. past and present
- c. communication and technology
- d. public space and private space
- e. print media and electronic media