brief history as an academic field, as are questions about “what counts as evidence” and “what counts as warrants for the claims we make.” These questions also index complex socioeconomic and historical factors which function to problematize the calls for methodological pluralism made by Kirsch and Shriver in this collection.

Despite the above caveat, the strength of Methods and Methodology lies in the intense scrutiny of various methodologies that constitute the field of composition studies. The many readers that this collection of essays will attract should therefore appreciate the facility with which the editors balance the multiple perspectives and contradictory orientations of its contributors. We may not be one big happy family, but we are a reflective and articulate one.


Reviewed by Joel Nydahl, Babson College

This well-written, provocative book is required reading for anyone interested in the role of computers in education. Tuman’s thesis is not a new one: the computer, like the printing press, is redefining literacy—in disturbing ways—by altering how we read, write, and think. But while the focus of Word Perfect is on the effect of the computer in teaching the language arts, Tuman has a larger agenda. Ultimately, he is concerned that the computer will sculpt a “new cultural landscape” that will “affect all of us, professors and students alike.” He argues that we can and must have a say in shaping the contours of that landscape.

Tuman believes that we pose the wrong question when we ask, “Will computers make us more or less literate?” What we should ask is, “What will it mean to be literate in a computerized, post-industrial age in which hypertextual and online reading and writing prevail?” In pointing out that what it means to be literate has always evolved and has always been determined by cultural (mostly economic) forces, Tuman demystifies the apparent naturalness of our commitment to certain educational values and pedagogy. “The truly important changes in pedagogy and other patterns of cultural reproduction,” he argues, always have been “in accord with underlying, more basic changes in economic production.” During the previous industrial age, for example, what it meant to be literate was determined by the forces and values of industrialism and economic expansion. At a time when capitalism, the production of goods, and territorial aggrandizement drove the economy, literate citizens needed to master “critical and aesthetic reading and writing.”

Tuman believes that we are once again at a point in history when economic, social, and educational influences are redefining literacy. To be
literates in today's post-industrial (information) age, citizens increasingly need the skills of “information retrieval and report generation”; tomorrow's citizens are likely to be rewarded more for skillfully manipulating data, negotiating compromises, and socially constructing knowledge than for mastering linear, logical modes of thinking. Tuman fears that the new modes of reading and writing (he has in mind primarily hypertext) will undermine critical thinking and “push literacy in the direction of information management.” Even worse, he argues, since the new literacy cannot support the fullness of human experience, there is the danger that we will end up substituting information for knowledge in our value systems.

As others have before him, Tuman argues that there already exists a new paradigm for literacy which is insinuating itself into the writing classroom—a paradigm that is more graphics-based, more visual, and more reader-centered than author-centered. Books and essays, Tuman warns, are likely to become as marginal to being literate and educated as memorizing texts—the pre-industrial test of literacy—is marginal now. The kinds of reading and writing that traditionally have been valued by English professors may prove less relevant to the marketplace than the kinds now taking place online and in the workplace. What truly worries Tuman is that we do not seem to know where we are going: “In an age when students increasingly will edit text at the screen with the same tool they also use to construct multimedia presentations, college composition seems to be heading for a crossroads, one that lacks a clear, safe path.”

Tuman is suspicious of the larger social agenda that seems to lie behind the embracing of the new online literacy in the composition classroom. He sees the “effort to de-center the teacher” as “part of the larger cultural effort to replace all hierarchical authority, including that within the family, with the dialogue of equals.” Why, he asks, are many composition specialists, in what he calls an “ideological fervor,” so eager to reverse traditional roles, to see the computer as a radical alternative instead of a more efficient extension of existing instructional practice? Tuman believes that the negotiation and social construction that are supported by hypertext and online writing are encouraging a new democratization in the classroom that is becoming increasingly student- and not teacher-centered and, in so doing, vitiating—even disenfranchising—the author-centered world of traditional literacy.

Tuman, instead, has a “vision of literacy online as an extension, not a rejection, of the literacy of print.” We cannot ignore “all that may have been laudable about print literacy while glossing over all that is troubling about reading online.” The stakes are simply too high: “The unanswered question . . . is what in fact happens to truth, justice, and social relations when (or if) print literacy is entirely overthrown?”

Contrary to what we might expect (given Tuman's attack on the motives and practices of those—among them, Anne Ruggles Gere, Michael Joyce, John Slatin, and Carolyn Handa—who have openly espoused the values of
hypertext and of the online culture), Tuman does not spurn the computer. He is no Luddite. What worries him is not the computer itself, but what we have done with it and what we are allowing others to do with it. In embracing the new literacy, he believes, we have too easily given in to economic pressures and to socializing powers that the computer supports. Tuman argues that the computer ought to become what we want it to be and ought to play the role we determine it will play. Deliberately and carefully, he believes, we need to redefine "the governing model of literacy"; in doing so, we need to use the best of what online literacy has to offer to create classes "in which all students . . . have a chance at succeeding."

In the dialectic between the traditional literacy of the industrial age and the new literacy of the online age, Tuman is a synthesizer. If we want a "truly democratic language arts curriculum," he says, we need to recognize that we "doom many students to be labeled failures" when we emphasize print literacy to the exclusion of other ways of knowing and communicating. It is both necessary and possible, he concludes, to craft an online literacy that supports "the same collective task of human transformation that has characterized our experience of print literacy."

*Word Perfect* is bound to promote controversy since Tuman makes those of us who are committed to using computers in the composition class engage in healthy but painful self-examination and self-evaluation. It is, however, a book well worth wrestling with.