In *Print culture* Dr Frances Robertson of the Glasgow School of Art has produced a work cutting across traditional disciplines and introducing readers to the field of cultural studies, where print culture seems rightly to belong. The term ‘print culture’ is encyclopaedic in scope and with boundaries not yet settled; it goes far beyond the traditional sense of the book and print as vehicles of information provision, but concerns itself with contexts where ‘marked and designed surfaces’ of a variety of materials form the basis of the subject. Robertson is interested in the design and production of banknotes, varieties in the use of photographic and printing techniques, novel forms of non-traditional illustration, the world of fanzines and ephemera not necessarily using letterpress, to name just a few examples. She looks at print culture in its relationship to the idea of modernity.

Librarians are not the primary audience of this work, but they will be stimulated by the author’s sharp vision. Dr Robertson acknowledges her debt to Marshall McLuhan, and her mind and method may also remind readers of the writings of Nicholson Baker. *Print culture* is aimed chiefly at cultural historians and students interested in the evolving study of design, the metamorphosis of print and questions of social and political values that are implied in this study.

The work is divided into thematic chapters as follows: Marked Surfaces, Steam Intellects, Lithography and ‘Improper’ Printing, Found Objects: Copy Shop Culture, and Greyscale: Half-tone Printing in the Age of Photomechanical Reproduction. Her conclusion (Post-print culture?) is followed by detailed notes and often-lively comments on relevant literature. The bibliography is also very thorough. The whole work is an impressive display of synthesis and exposition.

Despite its undoubted virtues, *Print culture* can also be hard going. Partly because of the heavy use of referencing, partly because of the over-long paragraphs and small typeface, and also because of the lack of sparkle in its style, the reader’s attention may weary. Some sections are rather thin (e.g. the discussion of the samizdat phenomenon). One puzzling matter is that the publisher, noted for works on printing practice and design, should have
produced such a drab title page and crowded pages of close print.

This work, with much material on digital developments, should prove popular for class use. Dr Robertson shows an impressive grasp of a variety of disciplines and speaks with an authority that allows her to maintain control over a complex gathering of threads. Her expertise in the visual arts is evident. In our rapidly evolving world of digital phenomena, a second edition will no doubt come along. This may allow a review of the physical aspects of the text and its presentation.

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