Metropolis: A Multimedia History of Western Civilization from the Neolithic to the Global Village. Metropolitan Arts, Inc..

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Published on H-OIEAHC (March, 1994)

This CD-ROM describes itself in the following fashion: <p> <blockquote>"<cite>Metropolis</cite> is an interactive multimedia program for high-school and college students about the history of Western civilization, focusing on the evolution of the City as a human institution, from its beginnings in the Neolithic village of 8,500 years ago to the Global Village that we will all inhabit in the next century. The program allows you to 'Time-Travel' through a chronological series of 1500 'events'–major works of art, key political events, scientific and technological advances, social trends. Slides and hypertext commentaries, dramatic re-enactments, debates, readings and musical excerpts are all used to explore these events further. At a dozen points along the way, you can visit a great city at a pivotal moment in its development [...]."</blockquote> <p> This prototype is an advanced copy (only 10% complete), developed for teachers interested in the use of multimedia in teaching. I installed it on a PC with no problem. Using the software requires an IBM-compatible 286 or above, with Windows 3.1 or above, and preferably 256-color SVGA graphics monitor (I did not have this). You'll also need 1.5 Mb free of hard drive, and a Windows-compatible sound card. <p> It seems likely that CD-ROMS such as <cite>Metropolis</cite> (in its final version) will soon begin replacing textbooks in high school and college teaching. CD-ROMs themselves are part of a booming business. A March 1, 1994, article in <cite>The New York Times</cite> notes that Microsoft's CD-ROM multimedia titles now provide about one third of the company's consumer business, which is up from less than 2% two years ago. Dell Computer will sell roughly 500,000 PCs with CD-ROM players this year, five times the amount of last year's level. And Link Resources Corp. says the number of households with CD-ROM players has increased fourfold last year,

to 1.9 million. Having taught a Western Civilization survey course several times with a textbook, several volumes of primary writings, and in-class slides, as well as having taught an American History survey to 1877 with a textbook, I welcome the change. <p> Although this prototype is only 10% complete, its structure shows the utility of Hypertext and multimedia teaching materials. Hypertext is text with a built-in dictionary or encyclopedia. As a student reads, certain keywords appear highlighted on the screen. A click on the word opens up an explanation ranging from a dictionary definition of the word to an essay equivalent to a short encyclopedia article. The explanation may itself have Hypertext references; once all is read, the original text is easily brought back to the screen. Images and maps, as well as primary sources (all mainstays of interdisciplinary teaching), appear on screen. In Bruges, a burgher's house appears in floor plan, with some areas highlighted. A click calls up reproductions of windows, furniture, silverware and the like, with a detailed description, as well as explanations of their creation and use. In London, a menu offers a selection of coffee houses to visit–Button's, Lloyd's, St. James's, White's, & Don Saltero's. The link reveals contemporary descriptions of the activities, conversations, and curios found in each establishment. In ancient Rome, a click on "Rhetoric" brings forth a good discussion of rhetoric from the <cite>exordium</cite> to the <cite>peroration</cite>, along with some correspondence between Trajan and Pliny the Younger. <p> The 1,500 events recorded can be modified once <cite>Metropolis</cite> is installed. As an experiment, I added the signing of the Declaration of Independence, and composed a complimentary short essay as an explanation, which the student could pull down from the top of the screen, where "Event Information" is noted. The addition worked perfectly. Moreover, a

note section is built into the program, so that students at any time can open up a "Notes" section to record their thoughts as they read. <p> One excellent feature of <cite>Metropolis</cite> is a "Connect Events" function, again invoked with a click at the top of the screen. Let's take the example of the "The Emancipation Proclamation, 1862," which includes a series of events that are short, reflecting the fact that this prototype is incomplete. In this CD-ROM chapter, the "Connect Events" feature places information in a series: (1) "Abolition of slavery in the British Empire, 1833," (2) "Emancipation of the Russian serfs, 1861," and (3) "Jim Crow laws ruled constitutional by the U.S. Supreme Court, 1896." A click on "(1)" will reconfigure the context of subtitle tree, to: (1) "Peasants' Revolt led by Wat Tyler, 1381," (2) "Portuguese begin African slave trade, 1441," and (3) "British women gain right to own property, 1870." Now, if we try a click on "(3)," our subtitle tree becomes: (1) "Arranged marriages begin to disappear in Europe, 1868," (2) "North Carolina becomes the first state to outlaw wife-beating, 1890," and (3) "American women gain right to vote, 1920." Thus students can see events as elements of various trends, not as isolated incidents. <p> The format of <cite>Metropolis</cite> has the advantage of providing narrative, interpretation, dictionary or encyclopedia references, and images, and music in one package. The feeling one gets is that history is an environment, not just a string of events–this I believe is something closer to the actuality of history than a textbook can achieve. Historians and other scholars should be aware that products such as <cite>Metropolis</cite> are coming on to the market, and should exert a professional influence to ensure that such products maintain a high standard. The professional time and energy devoted to the creation

of textbooks and encyclopedias will in the future probably be diverted in part to the creation of CD-ROMS. Many scholars will be excited by this prospect. In my own area–American History to 1830, with special interests in race, religion, and political thought–nothing like <cite>Metropolis</cite> exists yet, and there remains a fantastic potential to reconceptualize textbooks as multimedia CD-ROMs. Probably any historian can imagine an environment for his or her teaching–a narrative, with in-depth explanations, primary materials, and a collection of images, maps, and, frequently music. My message to publishers is that the age of the textbook and companion materials is over–the age of the CD-ROM is begun. <p> Furthermore, although there is some feeling today that "snazzy new technology" is elitist, the opposite is true, I believe. A similar belief is expressed by John V. Lombardi in "Campuses Need Not Wait for Snazzy New Technology to Enter Cyberspace," <cite>The Chronicle of Higher Education</cite>, March 2, 1994, A48. At Brown, for instance, a vast slide library is available for in-class slide presentations, but I know first-hand that nothing like it exists in local colleges, much less in public high schools around Brown. A wider use of CD-ROMS and the Internet will serve to open up the doors of our new information age, bridging some of the gap between elite and not-so-elite institutions. Most likely John Lombardi is right in arguing that the use of electronic media in education is a paradigm that will deliver "low-cost, high-value material," which "would open up access, reduce the economic barriers to learning, and encourage universities and schools to find ways to speak to larger, more extended audiences." Indeed, it seems an imperative to extend the benefits of advances in the technology of education. <p>

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Citation: John D. Saillant. Review of , *Metropolis: A Multimedia History of Western Civilization from the Neolithic to the Global Village.* H-OIEAHC, H-Net Reviews. March, 1994.

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