

Contemporary Affairs

**IN THE AGE OF THE
SMART MACHINE:
The Future of
Work and Power**
by Shoshana Zuboff
Basic, 1988
468 pp. \$19.95

In jargon that sometimes fogs her otherwise lucid argument, Zuboff, a professor at Harvard Business School, sketches one of the challenges of our most recent Industrial Revolution: "As the work of the sentient body is displaced by the newer demands of intellectual effort, who is to tell the 'white collars' from the 'blue collars'?"

The cause of this uncertainty is, of course, the "smart machines," the information technologies that have transformed the work routines of pulp-mill employees, Wall Street clerks, and insurance processors. Many industrial workers now have little or no direct physical contact with what is made; office clerks no longer perform on a single-task assembly line among peers. Such changes often lead to alienation and a sense of abstraction. But the fact that information technology "both accomplishes tasks and translates them into information" holds promise for greater job satisfaction: It enables workers to comprehend and even direct the entire production process.

Yet here lies the greatest challenge, says Zuboff. Will management allow workers to use their new-found knowledge and power, or insist on the rigid top-down hierarchy of command? Zuboff identifies the source of managers' anxiety—their own feeling of self-worth. After all, their traditional function is to serve as centers of information and decision-making. She argues, however, that organizational restructuring, with concentric rings of authority replacing the old ladder-like order, will benefit manager and worker alike. Zuboff supports her concept of "organizational integration" with several exhaustive case studies.

Arts & Letters

**HOGARTH TO
CRUIKSHANK:
Social Change
in Graphic Satire**
by M. Dorothy George
Viking, 1988
224 pp. \$39.95

Throughout the 18th century, England's graphic satirists lampooned the failings and abuses of their society with a broad brush. Yet modern viewers often mistake these brutal caricatures for charming period pieces, dismissing as gross exaggeration true portraits of the age's bottomless poverty and gargantuan excesses. However difficult to interpret, satirical prints—engraved and sold sepa-



rately to shock and amuse the rich in their drawing rooms and tavern patrons in their stews—remain the major pictorial record of the times.

In this handsome volume, first published 21 years ago, George, an English social historian, brought together prints from the Hogarth era (1720–64), the “golden age” of caricature under George III (1765–1810), and the Regency period (1810–35), the last ending with the advent of *Punch* magazine and illustrated journalism.

Products of the Age of Reason, artists such as George Cruikshank and William Hogarth condemned social abuses and called for reform, yet, catering to the superstitious masses, ridiculed “progress.” With no libel laws, everyone was fair game: young surgeons robbing graveyards (*The Anatomist Overtaken by the Watch Carrying off Miss W—in a Hamper*, W. Austin, 1773) or society dandies practicing the “art of not knowing people” (*The Cut Direct*, M. Egerton, 1827).

**COLUMBIA LITERARY
HISTORY OF
THE UNITED STATES**

Emory Elliott, general editor
Columbia, 1988
1263 pp. \$59.95

Robert Spiller, editor of the 1948 *Literary History of the United States*, maintained that “each generation must define the past in its own terms.” The *Columbia Literary History of the United States* handily meets the challenge. Not only does it reflect the “diversity, complexity, and contradiction” of critical opinion that has emerged during the past 40 years; it also manages to be both authoritative and provocative.

Without stinting on acknowledged masters such as Emerson and Faulkner, Elliott, the general editor of the volume, has broadened the scholarly canon to include previously neglected aspects of America’s rich literary heritage. Nontraditional media, such as songs and prayers, are given their due as influential expressions of national identity.

Women, minority, and ethnic writers’ contributions are given more than perfunctory nods. Wendy Martin’s essay on Emily Dickinson disputes previous “distorted” analyses that focus on the poet’s reclusiveness and its alleged causes (mental illness, repressed homosexuality). Robert Stepto finds that much criticism of black writers consigns them to “periods” or “movements,” assuming that their “significance is more social than literary.” Ignored, Stepto charges, are blacks’ stylistic contributions and diversity.