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Paper Knowledge: Toward a Media History of Documents, by Lisa Gitelman. Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014. 224 pp. HB 9780822356455, \$79.95; Paper, 9780822356578, \$22.95.

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A media historian whose research concerns American book history, techniques of inscription, and the introduction of new media, Lisa Gitelman currently holds appointments as Professor of English and Professor of Media Culture and Communication at New York University. Sweeping a vast paper trail in her new book, Gitelman selectively frames the vernacular genre of the document in four separate episodes from media history over the past 150 years. Each chapter pairs a specific technique of document reproduction with an eccentric personality or organization who shaped its appearance, style, and effects. Paper is the common ground of all these stories: the non-literary letterpress job printing of the 1870s epitomized by Oscar Harpel in Cincinnati; the 1930s-era typescript book constructed to preserve non-commercial scholarship, advocated by the historian and archivist, Robert C. Binkley; the transformative proliferation and transgressive acceptance of photocopies, exemplified by Daniel Ellsberg's copying and leaking of secret government documents in 1971; and circumstances outlining the introduction and development of the PORTABLE DOCUMENT FORMAT (.pdf) by Adobe Systems co-founder John Warnock in 1991.

The book's story begins at a time when the term "printer" meant a person whose expertise controls specialized tools, and ends in our time when a "printer" is a programmed machine that tells its expert when the task is completed. Technological innovation always allows for a new autonomy that previously was the domain of professionals and trained specialists, and Gitelman understands that emerging digital technologies have brought to our attention the dominant sea of paper we have been floating, swimming, and sometimes drowning in over the past century and a half. This was made palpable for me when I first read *Paper Knowledge* while on airplanes between Santa Barbara and Boston. My attention drifted from the book's cover and pages to a parade of print and digital documents coming into and out of my possession – drivers license, airplane boarding passes, travel directions, admission tickets to museums, car rental agreement, receipts, receipts, receipts – seemingly without end.

But why study such documents? Gitelman insists that they are important "because they are so evidently integral to the ways people think and live" (4). She expands our understanding of media history by showing that the meanings of documents arise, shift, and persist according to how they were made and how they operate in a particular context. The Xerox copier, for example, allowed Daniel Ellsberg not just to reproduce the legible quality of what became known as "the Pentagon Papers," but also to verify their origin and to confirm the authority of his classified source materials. The easy reproducibility of the xerox made accessible what was neither legally nor economically viable but was otherwise thought to have social, political, and humanitarian importance. More concerned with medium than with message, Gitelman encourages us to consider print as "a long-lived and radically heterogeneous category" (Gitelman 2014) that extends from each new machine and method for documentary reproduction.

From its inception, paper gained utility from its human scale. Known by name, height, and weight, it has easily assumed human characteristics. It is said to have a very good memory. *Paper Knowledge* makes us wonder if tomorrow's paper will be "smart" enough to keep up with the multi-platform media environment in which we all live, but whose presence we hardly ever recognize. We need more studies like this one to remind us.

References

Gitelman, Lisa and Beth Bacon, 2014. "The Written Word in Transition: An Interview With Lisa Gitelman," *Digital Book World*. <http://www.digitalbookworld.com/2014/the-written-word-in-transition-an-interview-with-lisa-gitelman/>