ways: speed of communication, multiple numbers of readers instantly reached, and the assumption that everyone who receives your digital message is interested in what you say. But it has a downside. Someone who paid two shillings for a book in the eighteenth century worked a week to buy that book and wanted to own it. With so much to choose from, readers of blogs may never find an account of such value to them.

The new types of 'group belonging' arising on the Internet, through which people achieve personal popularity and find safety, are creating a new emotional comfort zone. This begs for a broader discussion of emotional, moral and other types of literacy, which Doueihi does not address. I also craved more knowledge about the interior world, especially the affective and emotional resonances of web users, many of whom are young.

Doueihi has sensitive antennae for the legal ramifications of the new digital culture, as his debates on intellectual property rights, security and related issues show; and he may be right that at the root of these controversies is the annihilation of the old conception of what it is to be an author. In the print culture, the author controls the material that is read; in the new culture the reader is empowered to contribute, as in the shared editing of Wikipedia.

Many historians will counter that aspects of print culture — such as sustained narrative and religions organized by ethnic and national identity — are not defunct. We may spend our time in global digital cities, but our passports are not yet shredded. Doueihi might reply that this is a matter of degree: some civic forms have changed more rapidly than others. Our expectation of what a book is remains the same.

Although Doueihi bypasses the scientific community as a specific case, the new digital literacy must have altered what it means to be a scientist, especially in terms of identity and group belonging. Celebrity culture among scientists has undeniably become more frenzied in recent decades. Yet the effect of the Internet on the process of doing science is more elusive. With thousands of electronic messages traversing a typical laboratory each day, it will be increasingly difficult for sociologists to disentangle how networks of people manufacture scientific facts, in comparison with earlier accounts such as Bruno Latour and Steve Woolgar's *Laboratory Life* (1979).

Written in the 'old' discursive format, *Digital Cultures* includes much to think about. The pace of change is fast, but Doueihi's insight is fresh. ■

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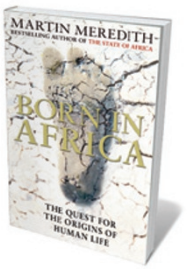
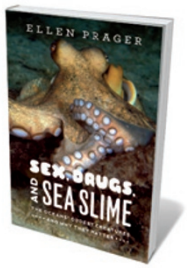
Books in brief



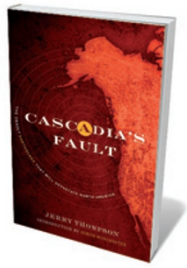
Born in Africa: The Quest for the Origins of Human Life
Martin Meredith SIMON & SCHUSTER *432 pp. £16.99 (2011)*
More than a century after Charles Darwin suggested that the ancestors of modern humans might lie buried in the African plains, we are still piecing together the jigsaw of our evolutionary past. Journalist and historian Martin Meredith tells the story of the palaeontologists who sought the bones of early hominids there, from the discovery of skeletons in Tanzania's Olduvai gorge in the early twentieth century to the latest genetic research on the branches of the human family tree.

Rising Force: The Magic of Magnetic Levitation
James D. Livingston HARVARD UNIV. PRESS *288 pp. £20.95 (2011)*
Giving a new meaning to literary suspense, physicist Lames Livingston devotes his book to the science of magnetic levitation. From laboratory demonstrations of floating magnets, flying frogs and suspended sumo wrestlers to the realities of urban maglev trains, he uncovers humanity's fascination with the magic of defying gravity, as well as the physics of magnetic fields and superconductivity.

Divine Machines: Leibniz and the Sciences of Life
Justin E. H. Smith PRINCETON UNIV. PRESS *392 pp. $45/£30.95 (2011)*
Seventeenth-century philosopher G. W. Leibniz is best known for his mathematical discoveries, including calculus. But he also investigated the science of life. Philosopher Justin Smith describes how Leibniz's experimentation in medicine, physiology, taxonomy and palaeontology influenced his philosophical ideas, causing him to shy away from mechanical views of nature towards more organic ones.



Sex, Drugs, and Sea Slime: The Oceans' Oddest Creatures and Why They Matter
Ellen J. Prager UNIV. OF CHICAGO PRESS *216 pp. $26/£17 (2011)*
Beneath the waves, anything goes, explains marine scientist Ellen Prager in her tour of some of the saltier habits of sea life. From the inside-out posture and bioluminescent fireworks of the vampire squid to the mucus deluge that protects the slimy hagfish, she explains how marine critters adopt unusual approaches to sex, predation and defence. And she explores how these diverse creatures, from krill to the grey whale, are crucial for our food supply, economies and even drug discovery.



Cascadia's Fault: The Earthquake and Tsunami That Could Devastate North America
Jerry Thompson and Simon Winchester COUNTERPOINT PRESS *352 pp. £16.06/£26 (2011)*
Following the recent devastation in Japan, journalist Jerry Thompson points out with unfortunate timeliness that North America is also at risk from a cataclysmic earthquake and tsunami. The Cascadia subduction zone stretches 800 kilometres from Vancouver Island to northern California, where the ocean floor slips below the continent. He follows the researchers who monitor the area, and asks what would happen if a magnitude-9 quake and 30-metre waves hit Vancouver and Seattle, Washington.