

Book Reviews

Les Catalogues En Ligne: Enquête à la Médiathèque de la Cité des Sciences et de l'Industrie—Panorama des Recherches. Ed. Mohamed Hassoun and Danielle Roger. Villeurbanne, France: ENSSIB [Ecole nationale supérieure des sciences de l'information et des bibliothèques], 1994. (ISBN 2-910227-04-9.)

The OPAC includes so much more, now, than mere books, catalog records, and even libraries. At the old OPAC Internet telnet addresses—"melyvl.ucop.edu" or "hollis.harvard.edu" or "library.ox.ac.uk" or "caen1.unicaen.fr"—users now can find full-text and campus directories and bulletin boards and the contents of CD-ROMs and images and connectivity all over the world and music and . . . so much more, some think, than mere books. And yet the books are there, still: giant libraries in dozens of countries in hundreds of institutions holding millions of books—no longer the meager OPAC offerings available online only a few years ago.

All of this growth has been exciting. The "Digital Library" and the home delivery of multimedia information have been as fascinating to librarians as they are to computer enthusiasts, Internet hackers, video game players, entertainment industry moguls, and politicians who currently are promoting them. It is too easy, though, with telecommunications as with any other new technology, to lose sight of the user. As the electronic sophistication of the library OPAC grows, the uninterested user, particularly—the user who is too busy or is just plain not interested enough to learn library organization, much less online search and retrieval techniques—increasingly is in danger of becoming buried or being excluded.

This is no less a problem in France than it is in the United States. Hundreds of

French libraries—some very small—have been available by direct dial-in from Minitels for several years. Dozens of other libraries in France have mounted full-scale interfaces either on the Minitel or on the Internet or on both. Users who dial in encounter a full and still growing panoply of online services: everything from "send a message to the librarian" to one-stop shopping information arrays similar to those offered by United States OPACs. In this, the French OPAC faces the same user definition problem faced in the United States: who are the users, what do they want and need, who is being included, who is being left out?

Editors Mohammed Hassoun and Danielle Roger provide several useful resources for addressing these questions. The book contains a traditional, rigorous OPAC user study: questionnaires, meticulously analyzed responses, tentative conclusions, subjects for "further investigation." The inquiry is broadened by the addition of Micheline Hancock-Beaulieu's comparative data in a study of OPACs and user studies in the United Kingdom, and an excellent and international analytical bibliography by Roger. Interestingly, the OPAC selected for the basic French study is not traditional: the "Médiathèque de la Villeite," an experimental library at the center of the giant "Cité des Sciences" science park in Paris. Some of the distinctive characteristics of its user population are outlined ably by the Médiathèque's Maria Witt.

One—American—question which might be asked of these researchers is the effect of prior exposure to the Minitel on these library OPAC users. The Minitel, after all, a uniquely French institution: no other nation can boast or complain of an



extensive national videotex network on which it already has trained generations of computer users. The present study asked the question, "Do you regularly use a micro-computer or a Minitel?," and then refined the question further by asking whether this involved a computer at home, at work, video games, Minitel, or a computer in some other context.

One interesting observation of the study was that while home and work computer usage correlated with frequent OPAC use, Minitel usage correlated inversely: users of Minitels don't use library OPACs so often, it is suggested, or at least users of library OPACs don't use Minitels. This observation deserves further examination, as it could hold a key to a multitude of questions now cropping up—in France, the United States, and elsewhere—as the new commercialized Internet (now somewhat analogous to "the Minitel") confronts an increasingly diminished public library sector (somewhat analogous to "the OPAC"), and networked information begins to deal with the widening social and political gulf between "information haves" and "information have-nots," both online and off. More knowledge about the frontier between public sector/public use applications (e.g., many libraries) and private sector/commercial uses (e.g., many applications on the Minitel and on the newly commercial Internet) would be much appreciated in Internet development.

The search for new uses of the Internet and of the Minitel and of libraries in the networked information age is nothing less than a search for new definitions. Old ideas of "academic testbeds," of "Minitel Rose," and of warehouses containing only printed books no longer serve. The users are, or ought to be, the most important part of the new definitions, helping librarians to identify who they are, what they want and need, how they will get it, whether they are users of "telnet" or "videotex" or "printed books" or of some amalgam of all three. User

studies, such as that presented here, are badly needed: so much the better if they are international in scope and can provide the basis for comparative study at a time when users' access to networked library and information resources rapidly is becoming international itself.—*Jack Kessler, kessler@well.sf.ca.us*

Serrai, Alfredo. *Biblioteche e bibliografia: Vademecum disciplinare e professionale.* Ed. Marco Menato. Roma: Bulzoni, 1994. 446p. Lire 70,000.000. (ISBN 88-7119-701-1.)

This book offers much more than its title indicates. If it were primarily a guide to Italian librarianship, it would be of only limited interest outside that one area. But besides being a wide-ranging if unconventional guidebook, this collection of essays presents a passionate critique of Italy's sense of cultural heritage. No segment of the Italian library world is spared from critical scrutiny that is both militant and idealistic. The subtitle's term "vademecum" is apt, not just as a name for a manual, but also as a call to "go with me," in this case with a librarian whose thirty-year career began with a strong foundation in philosophy and in the history of sixteenth-century bibliography, followed by successive appointments as director of two major Roman libraries—the Casanatense and the Alessandrina—then, since 1980, a professorship at the University of Rome. Since 1984 Serrai has edited the journal *Il Bibliotecario*, where he and colleagues have published studies on bibliography and the profession in general. He has published voluminously in the fields of library history, bibliography, and the education of librarians, with some eighteen books and hundreds of articles and reviews. This collection is based mainly on essays drawn from the journal with which he is personally identified.

The editor, Marco Menato, has done a remarkably good job of organizing a diverse assortment of essays into a thematic framework. Totalling about 100 pieces,