

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,

eighty-nine were chosen and updated from the 144 "schegge" published in the first series of *Il Bibliotecario* (1984-1993). The term "schegge" can be loosely translated as "critical notes," though Serrai calls them "public reflections," in which he takes the role of provocateur in areas colleagues might try to avoid. Using the four-page table of contents with all essays noted as subsections of thirteen major divisions, readers can dip into whatever sections are of interest.

Serrai's concerns cluster in three major areas. The largest part of the book is devoted to bibliography and bibliographic description (six sections), followed by libraries and library history (three large sections), and the education and image of librarians (three sections). Two general essays are less classifiable: one, the introductory essay on the concept of information, is a demanding survey of cognitive theory that leads to the author's own twelve-point theory of information. A final essay, actually the last of the critical pieces to appear in Serrai's journal, offers a bitter last word that reflects profound demoralization with the state of Italian libraries in general and with what the author sees as a mindless turn toward "computopia." Three appendices offer further insight into Serrai's perspective, mainly a sense that librarians need to look backward as well as forward, drawing on the legacy of bibliographers and critics who preceded them. The lively criticisms Venetian bookseller Justus Ehardt expressed in 1875 are still relevant today, while Nicholas Bundling's 1703 outline of coursework for a bibliographer's education epitomizes Serrai's reverence for a past master's rigorous standards of education and exactitude. Serrai's statements to a parliamentary commission on "beni culturali" indicate his hope that government support will be focused more intelligently and discriminate more carefully between restoration of cultural artifacts and the ongoing responsibilities of libraries.

While the anthology includes positive comments, practical methodology, and a great deal of constructive criticism, what stands out are the descriptions of things that have gone wrong. Serrai concedes that many are not unique to Italy. Among the more notable critical themes are a pervasive bureaucratic mentality at all levels; a lack of care among administrators and the government officials who impose misinformed notions on library planning, architecture, and cooperative projects; overexpenditure on poorly allocated staff who provide only limited service to library users; a mindless application of automation, where computing systems become more important than principles of bibliography; a lack of cooperation between libraries; an erosion of the profession, with too much attention to standardization and not enough concern with needed specialization; a growing tendency to treat books as artifacts or relics, not as living intellectual statements that should be as accessible to scholars as possible. Serrai uses strong language throughout, but especially where automation is discussed. He sees "barbarism" everywhere in today's Italian libraries, where "toxic clouds" or "smog" spread "arrogance, egotism, and *burocratismo*" over the best intentions. Dysfunction, chaos, and betrayal are at the worst end of the spectrum the author surveys, while a more benign "comedy of errors" characterizes other areas, such as changes in the National Library in Rome. "Smog" may be the best metaphor to explain how Serrai views what is wrong, since it cannot easily be blamed on individuals or isolated events, but rather on a collective mentality of neglect and indifference.

Several essays stand out as potentially important sources for the future. One is the set of comments on university libraries, focused on the University of Rome. The essays in this section describe how recent efforts at reformation have gone astray and trace a prescriptive course for the consolidation of the university's de-

centralized library system. Among the most useful aspects of this and other sections are the citations of articles, studies, and official publications to illustrate particular controversies. These references indicate not just erudition, but also an awareness of contemporary opinion, from Italian newspapers where scholars and literary figures frequently publish articles on the nation's libraries, to European monthlies such as the *Economist* where there have been dossiers on problems facing contemporary libraries.

The most carefully crafted essays are in the sections on bibliography and bibliographic description, where historical development is discussed in depth and applied to contemporary cataloging principles. An article on Mercury as the god of libraries and bibliography might be seen as the author's central message: that the Renaissance concept of "Mercurius in Trivio"—careful indexing and reference tables originally associated with guideposts set at crossroads for travelers—should motivate those concerned with preserving and disseminating knowledge. Within the sections on bibliographic description, the essays grouped under the heading "Automation" show Serrai's most acute disappointment. Several essays deal with initiatives of the Servizio Bibliotecario Nazionale (SBN) to computerize Italy's libraries, an effort that began its most recent phase in 1980. Serrai agrees that this could be a positive initiative if directed by leaders who act intelligently and with expertise. Instead, all seems driven by technocrats who often do not understand libraries. The result is a massive expenditure of funds for developing advanced automated systems, while there is dangerous neglect of fundamental problems.

On the surface, these essays are aimed at both the neophyte and the seasoned professional who wish to reflect on libraries and librarianship with a special focus on Italy. But Serrai has already written more straightforward manuals and his-

tories, all well respected and regularly cited in publications on Italian libraries. This collection seems more useful in the long run as a representation of its time, a personal testimony. In a country with some of the world's best historical libraries and archival collections and where influential bibliographers from the sixteenth century on have created a distinguished tradition of analytical study of paleography, books, and printing, it is well worth knowing the views of a contemporary critic who has been involved with three decades of library development.

Serrai deserves to be known outside Italy not just for his frustration with his own country, but also for what he has written on the role of libraries, bibliography, and bibliographic classification in general. Just as Armando Petrucci, Roger Chartier, Henri Martin, and Geoffrey Nunberg have turned scholars' attention toward the significance of writing forms, printing history, reading, and libraries, and as more attention is being paid to the taxonomy of knowledge, research is likely to turn as well to other areas where it can be shown that libraries play an active role in our conception of history and national identity. Maybe Serrai does excessively curse the darkness. He certainly contemplates his own form of utopia, the best of all possible worlds where every librarian is thoroughly educated and committed to public service, where every library is a sanctuary for learning, offering accessible and impeccably described holdings. In the face of difficult realities facing librarians in every country, this is indeed wishful thinking. For Italian libraries there is still a need to examine more fully the implications of regional rivalries and competing interests so characteristic of a relatively young nation, as well as the entrepreneurial development of private collections that are now the focus of cooperative programs. Though further questions remain, this book's underlying idealism represents traditions of

scholarship and service that survive even in the age of the information engineer.—*Mary Jane Parrine, Stanford University, Stanford, California*

Wittig, Rob (for In.S.Omnia). *Invisible Rendezvous: Connection and Collaboration in the New Landscape of Electronic Writing*. Hanover, N.H.: Wesleyan/Univ. Pr. of New England, 1994. 187p. \$18.95 (cloth). (ISBN 0-8195-5275-5.)

Invisible Rendezvous has two main themes. One is a history of Invisible Seattle (In.S.Omnia is an abbreviated form of Invisible Seattle Omnia), a performance art and computer bulletin board group, many of whose participants work in the publishing or printing trade. The other is a treatise on the effect of computer networks and group communication on writing and creative efforts in general.

Between chapters group members provide pictures of themselves in action, their projects, copies of e-mail messages, charts, and graphs to illustrate their philosophy. On several reprinted flyers they invite the participation of "artists, poets, actors, dancers, architects, idle men, fallen women, all persons of slender means, dubious antecedents, and questionable loyalties."

Invisible Seattle is passionate in its quest to find and free the artist in everyone. Its project to write a novel of the city, with all the inhabitants contributing, is characteristic. "Literary workers" donned white coveralls and stopped people on the city streets, asking them to tell a story or complete unfinished sentences. There would not be one official version of the book, but a number of variations on the story. The protagonist and the love interest, Terry, were never identified by gender. The group also compiled an "atlas" of the city, composed of locations collected, again, from people on the street, and offered building permits for new or modified constructions (asking if an addition to the structure would include ears, feet, or wings). Another Invisible Seattle project drew up a new, alternate constitution.

Invisible Seattle also created a computer bulletin board through which members and others could communicate electronically and write collaboratively. A considerable portion of the book is devoted to discussing the way this medium affects the creative process. This analysis is tied into the works of Jacques Derrida (one of the sponsors of their Fulbright grant), and Michel de Certeau, Umberto Eco, and Georges Perec are among those listed in the bibliography.

Alas, the organizers of In.S.Omnia seem to think they have created something new. Writing and creating collaboratively, however, is certainly not a new development. One of the examples given in the book, wherein one computer group user starts a story and others join in and add sentences, is reminiscent of a child's party game in which each child adds a sentence in turn. Using this technique in cyberspace is merely moving it to a new medium.

While Invisible Seattle's passion is admirable, and some of its ideas are thought-provoking, it falls prey to a common fault of the passionate—that they alone have discovered the Promised Land

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