

physical or intellectual phenomenon." So while a star, a pebble, and a living animal are not documents, photographs and catalogues of stars are documents, stones in a museum of mineralogy are documents, and animals that are cataloged and shown in a zoo are documents. Books and similar written works are types of documents, and, given Briet's understanding of documents, it follows that librarians are a type of "documentalist." But Briet believes the documentalist profession also includes the roles of archivist and curator. While librarians preserve and conserve books (the exhibits of acquired facts), documentalists preserve, conserve, and interpret. The documentalist identifies, interprets, and disseminates documents relevant to researchers and subject specialists. This is similar to the role some special librarians play within research institutes or corporations. Most of Briet's second essay expands on her concept of the documentalist profession. Much attention is given to the documentalist's methods and instruments (most of which, she acknowledges, are borrowed from old techniques developed by similar professionals: e.g., librarians), and to the kind of education necessary for documentalists.

In her final essay, "A Necessity of Our Time," Briet considers how the documentation movement contributes to the progress and unification of civilization. Premising her remarks on the belief that humanity strives toward unity, she discusses how an international network made up of local document centers is the most feasible model for developing a unified, worldwide knowledge system, as contrasted with the "universal bibliography" envisioned by many of her predecessors. Ronald Day, assistant professor of library and information science at Wayne State University, offers a provocative interpretation of the significance of Briet's views and their implications for today's information scientists. Day argues that Briet anticipated the enormous challenges to traditional library practices from new technologies, and as a result developed

a broader understanding of what constitutes a cultural document. Briet's vision of the future of documentation is rooted in an understanding of the world as a patchwork quilt of cultures producing myriad kinds of documents. Each culture and its documentation centers will require techniques and technologies suited to the different kinds of documents. Instead of seeking the universal library, Briet advocates creating a network consisting of the documentation centers from every culture. According to Day, "Just as Culture is transformed in cultures, so the Library is dispersed into documentary techniques and technologies. This is something that still needs to be seen and reckoned with in library education and in library institutions. Briet wrote of it a half century ago, and these changes have only increased since then."

A worthwhile read for librarians, information scientists, and students. —W. Bede Mitchell, Georgia Southern University.

**Lanham, Richard A.** *The Economics of Attention: Style and Substance in the Age of Information*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006. 312p. alk. paper, \$29 (ISBN 0226468828). LC 2005-22857.

Like many before him, Richard Lanham is impressed by one of the big technological changes of our time. For centuries, we have relied on various forms of paper and, to a lesser extent, other hardcopy surfaces to record, preserve, and transmit texts. But now we appear to be in the midst of an epochal shift, from these more familiar surfaces to an increasingly digital "expressive space." Lanham began the inquiry reported in *The Economics of Attention* with the question "What's next for text?"; but this narrower question of the movement from page to screen seemed to invite and perhaps even require reflection on an even broader one: "What's new about the 'new economy' and what's not?" The movement back and forth between these two issues creates the central tension of the argument.

Many twentieth-century economists and other social commentators—perhaps most notably Fritz Machlup and Daniel Bell—noted a central shift beginning in the early twentieth century, from economies of goods to economies of services, and from producing and distributing commodities to the accumulation and the selective use of knowledge and information. Originally taken for granted as an intangible add-on to production and distribution, information and knowledge are now recognized by economists as key additions of value, and further as values in their own right. This great shift forms part of the assumed background of Lanham's book, but he is actually more interested in one of its more recent consequences. This shift to producing and distributing information has created an entirely different kind of abundance: an abundance of the intangible, of intellectual goods and services, an abundance of ideas, facts, information, figures, and images. Thus we face a problem of the allocation of our attention to this ever-increasing load of informational value. How do we handle this?

Lanham is here thinking beyond the typical operations of filtering, evaluating, and assessing that will already be familiar to scholars, librarians and information workers, publishers, and reflective readers. These he recognizes as essential to our attempts to manage a given output of information, but he really wants to raise the issue of how we respond to it in the first place—how do we allocate our attention to it? The greater the pool of available information, the harder it is to attend to items in it. Since scarcity is one of the chief conditions of value, and economics is essentially about valued resources, attention has come to have a distinct economic significance. Here he invokes the ancient rhetorical concept of oscillation, or the use of the mind to move back and forth between content and consciousness, object and subject. He is recommending, in other words, that we not focus exclusively on the content or “stuff” of information,

but rather what was originally regarded as the inessential “fluff” of the attention span. For in an “economy of attention” it will be the fluff that moves to center stage as it upstages the stuff. Style and substance change places as style becomes the new substance.

The argument for the parallel transformations of the expressive space and the wider shifts from economies of goods, services, and information to an economy of attention is spun out in in the first five chapters. Chapter two engagingly and informatively explores the provocations of twentieth-century avant-garde movements like futurism, dada, surrealism, expressionism, and the op and pop art of the postwar period by casting them as cultural high-brow versions of the attention-getting and eye-catching techniques so adroitly used in advertising and sales, marketing, branding, and the design-rich, media-created ideal worlds of power, adventure, danger, sex, fun, status, and style. All of these effectively catch and hold our attention, if in different ways and for different purposes. Chapters three and four apply these considerations to the evolution of writing and printing and discuss how the expressive space might be enhanced by digitization's ability to animate, enliven, and otherwise set sober text into ecstatic motion. Chapter five provides a conceptual framework uniting two alphabets: the rigidly fixed and self-effacing alphabet of “black and white” print that invites us to ignore it and look through it to the meaning it transmits, and the “alphabet that thinks,” which attracts our attention to it directly, even as we are simultaneously invited to seek the meaning beyond it.

The first five chapters, though marked by occasional uncritical declarations of the author's affection for his own biases, are compelling and very much worth reading; the final three are more uneven. Chapter six, “Barbie and the Teaching of Righteousness,” presented as a kind of comic interlude, detracts from the momentum built by the first five. The next-to-last chapter presents a sonorous

hymn to the inherent superiority of online education; and the concluding chapter seems not to offer much that is new. But the integrated cogency of the first five make this book worthwhile nonetheless. The concept of “expressive space” is useful as a way of conceptually organizing diverse types of communication; the use of the ancient rhetorical device of oscillating between surface and depth is adroit and insightful; and the author’s clever exploitation of font selection in his own textual design nicely reinforces the central importance of attention. —*Michael F. Winter, University of California, Davis.*

**Meadow, Charles T.** *Messages, Meaning, and Symbols: The Communication of Information.* Lanham, Md.: Scarecrow, 2006. 250p. alk. paper, \$40 (ISBN 0810852713). LC 2005-23069.

Charles Meadow’s *Messages, Meaning, and Symbols* is intended to be an introductory text about information, communication, and knowledge for general readers, information science undergraduates, and “anyone from age fourteen or fifteen up.” Meadow cuts a wide swath, attempting to survey the history of communication technologies, the nature of information, and the dense conceptual interrelationship of communication, information, and knowledge. His style is conversational and informal, and, as befits an introductory work, the book contains dozens of photographs, drawings, graphs, and charts.

The first third of the book outlines the history of communication, beginning with cave drawings and moving into the Internet age over the course of four chapters. Meadow defines and explains a number of important terms over the next two chapters, then continues the narrative with a discussion on messages, media, and the transmission of information. The book concludes with chapters on meaning and understanding, an overview chapter entitled “Communication: The Full Monty,” and a summary chapter on the nature of communication and informa-

tion in the modern, technology-drenched world. Throughout the book, he provides numerous examples and anecdotal evidence to support his points, sometimes at the expense of providing the kind of clear explanations that an introductory text needs when discussing such complex topics as meaning and understanding.

Meadow covers a lot of territory here; it’s an ambitious undertaking to be so inclusive in such a thin volume, especially one pitched to the information science novice. Recognizing that such an approach sometimes precludes adding much depth, Meadow makes a point of sending his introductory-level readership to the many references listed in the book’s sixteen-page bibliography. He refers readers to the Library of Congress’s online catalog, with the caveat that “many of the works listed are not easily available elsewhere.” He also states that “an interested reader must do a lot of searching, on the Web and in libraries. Many people seem to feel that all the information they might want is on the Web and is free. Both assumptions are wrong. Just as in archaeology, there is no substitute for digging.” This can hardly be encouraging news for the “general reader” without sophisticated searching skills or access to a good library.

Upon inspection, however, it seems that Meadow himself sometimes relies on easily available Web resources in his research, rather than digging deeper. He frequently cites general reference sources such as the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, when more authoritative, subject-specific sources would be more appropriate. He cites the hobbyist Web site *World War 2 History Info* ([www.worldwar2history.info/](http://www.worldwar2history.info/)) for information about the Allied disinformation campaign prior to D-Day. Why use a hobbyist Web site, one that would fail a basic Web evaluation test for authority, when other sites that are more academic or authoritative are easily available?

Some information he provides is incorrect. For instance, Meadow asserts that Navajo code talkers in World War