sees the role of middle managers moving away from controlling or limiting information and toward coordinating and adding value.

The strength of this book lies in its clear synthesis of records management issues and descriptions of technological changes in the workplace. Included are discussions on records retention policies; analysis of information use; explanations of relational and inverted index systems, SGML, the Internet and the World Wide Web, and scripts; and descriptions of training programs. Although Megill openly acknowledges that portions of the book are based on Carlos A. Cuadra's *The Corporate Memory and the Bottom Line* (1994) and a paper presented by Judith Wanger at the Online Conference in 1995, he also provides an excellent summary of a wide range of recent research. Moreover, he presents cogent arguments for an integrated approach to documentation while acknowledging the contributions already made by the separate disciplines of records management, archives, and library science. However, the concept of documentation strategy used here relies more on standard records retention appraisals than on the perspective of archival documentation outlined in Helen Samuels's *Varsity Letters: Documenting Modern Colleges and Universities* (1992). Annotated bibliographies at the end of each chapter offer practical pointers to more detailed histories and analyses, and highlighted sections give easy access to statistics on the costs of lost documents and to useful summaries of records concepts.

The weakest points of the book are the attempts to provide practical guidance in appraisal and in starting corporate memory programs. The discussion of rules of worth remains at the level of an overview and is too conditional to truly assist in the design of viable retention periods. The suggestions for starting a program include interviewing key employees (who may work at any or all levels of the current corporate structure); bringing search engines to current stored electronic data; creating systems to capture and index electronic documents; and developing imaging systems. These suggestions are indeed useful starting points, but the descriptions are insufficient as guidelines for planning their implementation.

Ultimately, the usefulness of this work will be in its presentation of current issues and the accessibility of Megill's arguments for rethinking corporate records issues. It is particularly appropriate for records managers, archivists, and librarians faced with persuading information-illiterate corporate or institutional personnel to change or implement records policies.—*Jan Blodgett, Davidson College.*

Sardar, Ziauddin, and Jerome R. Ravetz. *Cyberfutures: Culture and Politics on the Information Superhighway*. New York: New York Univ. Pr., 1996. 161p. $45, cloth (ISBN 0-8147-8059-8); $16.95, paper (ISBN 0-8147-8058-X). LC 96-19794.

Rising from academic obscurity in the space of just a few years, the Internet is fast becoming a public information system of global proportions. That this has occurred rather rapidly is an understatement; it is as if "the telephone, television, and the private automobile had all developed simultaneously, and in a matter of months rather than decades." We must ask how this new technology will affect culture and society in the years to come, but it is an arduous task, the editors claim. In fact, according to the editors, in the grip of Internet technological enthusiasm and hype, it is all but impossible to come to any sensible conclusions about the Internet's future—the volume's ostensible topic. So the editors abandon this project at the beginning, preferring, instead, to unpack the "underlying assumptions and values of the cyberspace revolution that is unfolding before our eyes." They offer this collection of essays to

"question the absolute faith that is being exhibited in the goodness of cybertechnologies and their ability to enhance the quality of life." That is a worthy goal, as anyone remotely concerned with the Internet will readily agree. What can librarians learn from this study? In short, this volume serves up a lot of juicily caustic critiques and provokes thought but, ultimately, tells more about the limitations of the type of scholarship that underlies the volume (it is called "cultural studies") than it does about the Internet's hidden assumptions. One reason, as the reader will see, is that the authors make the same mistake that enthusiasts do: They greatly exaggerate the scale and scope of the network's impact. A second reason is that the authors use a particularly unconvincing analytical method which does little to reassure a skeptical reader that the inferences drawn are anything more than mere opinion.

The centerpiece of the volume is Sardar's "alt.civilizations.faq: Cyberspace as the Darker Side of the West." A coauthor of *Barbaric Others* (1993), Sardar writes extensively on information technology, third-world issues, and Islam, a subject factory that one would think would be quite capable of manufacturing vitriol in its purest form—and Sardar does not disappoint. The fundamental contradiction of Western culture, Sardar suggests, is its Janus-faced presentation of "projected innocence, standard-bearer of civilization, the enforcer of universal law and morals," coupled with a darker side, a "psychotic inner reality" of the "pathologically untamed." On the one hand, the West gives us universal declarations of human rights; on the other, it is a dominator culture bent on opening new territories and filling them, genocidally, with adventurers, perverts, and butchers of the innocent. For Sardar, cyberspace is the West's newest New World, a new frontier in which the its Janus-faced tendencies are abundantly evident. For every communitarian working

to extend cyberspace access in the service of political equality, Sardar suggests, there is a Jake Baker running around with his literary sword, hacking up female classmates in alt.sex.stories. And as cyberspace grows, it absorbs, appropriates, and, ultimately, trivializes anything non-Western by forcing it to become a representation of itself in terms ultimately dictated by the network's underlying Western assumptions. For Sardar, the Internet is simply the latest form of Western imperialism, an apparently benign, but ultimately destructive, force that non-Western countries would be wise to resist. This argument is one that undoubtedly will strike a respondent chord in France, where the Internet is seen with great alarm as the avenue by which Hollywood and Mickey Mouse will finally be able to crush the French literature and language, but it is surely overstated: The network's current English bias reflects the fact that approximately 90 percent of all IP addresses are located in English-speaking countries, although this is changing rapidly. For me, the argument that the Internet is a colonizing force on the order of Western colonial expansion mistakes the network's current Anglocentrism for an enduring trend and badly misrepresents its likely future evolution on an international scale. Sardar's argument is likely to find its most welcome reception among fundamentalist and totalitarian third-world regimes, considering their palpable fear that Internet connectivity will undermine totalitarian control.

Ravetz's "The Microelectronics Revolution and the Dialectics of Ignorance" serves up its caustic cocktail from neo-Marxism. Although previous technological revolutions have created dramatic changes in social empowerment by altering access to the means of production, cyberspace will bring a differentiation of consciousness: Whereas some experience "ever more intoxicating powers," those who are not connected will sink deeper into hopelessness. The

result will be sabotage and terrorism, coupled with the loss of civil liberties as governments crack down. I frankly do not see how the chaotic and varied assemblage of fact, opinion, marketing hype, and loonyism that currently constitutes the "knowledge" available on the Internet could possibly confer "ever more intoxicating powers." Admittedly, the ability to access Internet "knowledge" (or more to the point, to differentiate between online trash and treasure) may make some slight contribution to career success in the years to come, but the strategic value of Internet access surely pales before the real determinants of class differentiation in Western society (class, race, and differential access to high-quality education).

Turning to the "democratic possibilities" of electronic media technologies, Sobchak ("Democratic Franchise and the Electronic Frontier") begins by noting, in the term *franchise*, the conflation of the right to political participation and the exclusive rights of commercial enterprises to sell products in a certain area. For most of us, the term's two meanings might seem accidental, an artifact of intersecting word histories, but for Sobchak, they testify to an underlying cultural conflation of political liberalism and capitalism that pops up in anything American do. This conflation signals a contradiction between political freedom and monopoly capitalist domination, Sobchak says, which lies at the heart of American culture. But, of course, this is not recognized: It is mystified by its reappearance at the superstructural level in the notion of free-market competition. The Internet repeats this pattern, she says, by offering what appears to be enhanced political participation blended with a healthy free market, but this masks the areas of contestation between political freedom and capitalist domination, and to the extent that you buy into this, you become a numb, apathetic consumer-

ist and your politics become Libertarian. If the Center for Democracy and Technology's Web site starts sporting Microsoft's banner ads, sells its demographics to direct marketers, and links to Ayn Rand's *The Fountainhead*, I suppose I will have to concede that Sobchak is right—but do not count on it.

There are other essays in the book, but what I have described thus far serves to illustrate both the strengths and the weaknesses of the cultural studies approach that informs much of the volume. The method boils down to positing some type of horrifyingly unjust, underlying structure that you think tends to manifest in all the various products of Western culture, and then to select some things you have heard about the Internet that seem to echo this pattern. As a method, this pattern-matching, Marx-alluding technique provides the touchstone for interesting, thought-provoking, and often maddening creative writing projects. The results can be amusing, too, thanks in part to the unintentionally hilarious overstatements (e.g., "Prepare for holographic Slashers to break out of 'alt.sex.stories' and stalk the earth"). At the end of the day, though, you really do not know anything more about the Internet's hidden assumptions, or how the network is likely to shape society in the years to come.—*Bryan Pfaffenberger, University of Virginia.*

Tolstoy's Dictaphone: Technology and the Muse. Ed. Sven Birkerts. St. Paul, Minn.: Graywolf (Graywolf Forum, 1), 1996. 261p. $16 (ISBN 1-55597-248-9). LC 96-75790.

Many librarians, as they watch the gradual migration of their collections from print to electronic form, experience some unease over a question few actually verbalize: What influence does the medium through which our culture passes have on the ability and willingness of readers to engage in dialog with