

broaden the mind, but it also may confuse, even frighten, and reinforce tendencies to withdraw. Management of the emerging information glut becomes the important issue. O'Donnell has kind words for librarians, and he sees opportunities for them to take the lead by extending their profession's experience and expertise in evaluating, filtering, and describing information resources into cyberspace. Librarians are the intelligent software needed to organize electronic information resources, but they will face significant challenges in maintaining access to, and preserving resources in, electronic formats.

Higher education, too, has a significant contribution to make in preparing people for life in a world of electronic text. However, this will require a reordering of priorities and practices as well as significant changes in the way we teach. The electronic resources already at hand provide an unprecedented opportunity to emphasize the learning process by having students participate in the ongoing work of scholarship. In cooperation with each other and with their professors, students can engage interactively with textual resources in projects that will make them active participants in broadening and deepening our collective knowledge. Such experience in the classroom can give students a better preparation for life after graduation than do conventional pedagogical practices.

O'Donnell points out that improvements and innovations in technology initially tend to be perceived simply as better ways to do familiar tasks. Over time, their cumulative effects, which cannot be foreseen, much less controlled, create new and different environments to which individuals and societies must adapt. In *Avatars*, O'Donnell has chosen to speak to the positive potential consequences of electronic texts even as he acknowledges that there are other, less desirable possibilities. As individuals, we may hope for the best while fearing something worse and, bearing in mind Cassiodorus who puts in a final appearance at the conclu-

sion of *Avatars*, do the best we can to respond constructively.—Chris Africa, *University of Iowa*.

Qualitative Research. Eds. Gillian M. McCombs and Theresa M. Maylone. Champaign, Ill.: University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science, *Library Trends* 46, no. 4 (spring 1998): 597-789. \$18.50 (ISSN 0024-2594).

Despite, or perhaps because of, the importance of a largely quantitative information science in the recent history of librarianship, efforts to introduce us to, and school us in, qualitative research are now much more common than they once were. Wisely steering clear of the more general epistemological issues in the philosophy of the social sciences (not because these are unimportant but, rather, because their importance demands separate and full treatment elsewhere), this collection of ten contributions nonetheless manages to cover a sizable range of methodological and theoretical issues. That in itself makes it worth reading.

For example, Horn economically describes a set of four general theoretical orientations that tends to frame much, if not all, of qualitative research: symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, and critical studies (the bibliography provides many places to continue for those who are interested). Gary P. Radford addresses the positivist bias of information science with useful discussions of recent French social theory. Day discusses organizational change from the standpoint of discourse analysis and expansive ideology-critique. And Liebscher rounds out the more theoretical end by recognizing (as much of the better work in the social sciences shows) that quantitative and qualitative methods need not be mutually exclusive and should be creatively played off one another. For those entrenched in the positivist camp who are unconvinced by the general arguments set forth in favor of qualitative research, Liebscher's discussion of triangulation should be especially relevant. They ought

to be reassured to learn, if they do not already know, that the attempt to tackle the more interesting empirical questions is leading an increasing number of researchers to select methods from both paradigms.

The remainder of the papers, with one exception, presents results of empirical research in library and information use. McCombs applies the ethnographic approach of cultural anthropology to an academic computing center so as to better appreciate the contrast between the cultures of computing and librarianship. Resurrecting an older theme in studies of reference work, Marie L. Radford presents data from a naturalistic study showing how nonverbal cues from library workers influence users' decisions to seek help (eye contact seems to be the most notable of these). Borrowing from cognitive anthropology, Smith and Yachnes discover and describe the kinds of mental scripts followed by users of electronic texts. And Pendleton and Chatman study the use and exchange of information entirely outside the formal contexts of library use, in what the authors call "small world perspectives." The final paper (Wallace and Van Fleet) is somewhat outside this general scope and deals with the reception of qualitative research from the standpoint of the editorial traditions of professional journals.

Even though this collection is largely coherent and the contributions explore various inflections of a central topic, it is still rather hard to evaluate. Perhaps this is because the very idea of qualitative research harbors a demanding diversity of viewpoints, styles, and methods; quantitative research, by contrast, seems to seek (though it may not always achieve) universality or even uniformity of purpose and outlook. This raises the question, how is it possible to manage all this diversity?

In her introduction, Maylone claims that an underlying common framework unites these viewpoints—the "emphasis on context." This is true when we oppose qualitative to quantitative; and it seems to fit reasonably well when we are look-

ing at symbolic interactionism or hermeneutics, two of Horn's four frameworks. But with phenomenology, the picture is otherwise, for here subjectivity (or intentionality perhaps) is more fundamental than context; indeed, the contexts of experience are understood in phenomenological terms as constitutive achievements of consciousness. And with critical studies, a rather broad category that may need greater refinement, the common denominator seems to be power, not context. In Foucault, to take one example, there is a strong sense that the power distributed unevenly throughout various contexts of discourse tends to break up contexts episodically and reorganize them along different lines.

Aside from these conceptual issues, there is one other problem that, though certainly not fatal, makes overall assessment difficult. Although the papers are all relatively interesting on their own and are worth reading, they are not all clearly related to the four paradigms set out in Horn's lead essay. The papers by Gary Radford and Day, for example, exemplify aspects of critical studies; in the essays by McCombs, Marie Radford, Smith and Yachnes, and Pendleton and Chatman, on the other hand, there is a common reliance on ethnography. How are they related to symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, or hermeneutics? Thus, although these papers present interesting qualitative findings, their theoretical significance remains somewhat unclear. Alternatively, perhaps Horn's essay places too much emphasis on general philosophical perspectives and not enough on the relation between ethnography and social theory in the emerging qualitative paradigm. Either way, the effect is one of imbalance.

These observations suggest areas in which more work might be done and certainly do not detract from the considerable interest of the volume. Mark Tyler Day's essay, for instance, is heavily theoretical, and yet he also provides an example of how specialized software that has been used in theory-testing also can

be used to generate theory from digitized text collections by permitting the analysis and interpretation of texts along thematic lines. This kind of research has been done, of course, for decades with much expenditure of time and effort, but Day's examples show a new approach that automates some of the work and presumably frees the researcher for more analysis and interpretation. One cannot help but wonder if something like this has applications in areas such as citation and citation context analysis, which hitherto have been served mostly by quantitative methods. If so, one could study citations as discursive practices, just as one studies the larger texts and contexts in which they are embedded. Examples such as these show that this volume has the potential to stimulate some very promising research indeed.—*Michael F. Winter, University of California-Davis.*

Travis, Molly Abel. *Reading Cultures: The Construction of Readers in the Twentieth Century.* Carbondale, Ill.: Southern Illinois Univ. Pr., 1998. 173p. \$39.95, alk. paper (ISBN 0-8093-2146-7). LC 97-10063.

Reading Cultures explores the expectations that readers bring to books and the ways that critics, scholars, teachers, and the texts themselves work to "construct" readers in different times and places. It analyzes reactions to and interactions with different kinds of literary works. The particular contribution that Molly Abel Travis (associate professor of English at Tulane University) hopes to bring to the field of reader response theory is to examine reading communities or cultures as defined by race, gender, class, and age. To oversimplify a bit, she wants to synthesize the rhetorical study of texts and readers with newer concerns of feminism, cultural studies, postcolonialism, queer studies, and so on. No small task.

The implied reader of this book about readers is an English professor or graduate student. Because I am neither, I found the book heavy going. It would be easy to declare it unreadable: laden with ref-

erences to other people's theories (no doubt the residue of a dissertation) and brimming with the specialized vocabulary of critical theory ("metaplagiarism" was a new term for me). But this would be cowardly. As others have argued, literary studies—like all academic disciplines—is entitled to its own jargon, theory, and intellectual rigor. So I will soldier on and try to translate the main points of the book into ordinary English.

Travis works her way through the twentieth century in five chapters, each a foray into a different field of readerly complexity. "Two Cultures of Reading in the Modernist Period" begins with an analysis of "the cultural effort invested in rendering Joyce's *Ulysses* readable." The author makes excellent use of primary sources and quotations to tell this essentially comic tale. Readers were perplexed and angered by *Ulysses*. Perhaps many still are. Joyce knowingly dismantled and parodied all the comfortable conventions of nineteenth-century narrative, refusing to compromise for readability's sake. Promoters of high art labored to persuade the American public of the novel's order, harmony, and mastery. Travis reproduces a two-page spread that appeared in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1934 entitled "How to Enjoy James Joyce's Great Novel *Ulysses*," with a plan of Dublin, list of characters, and detailed synopsis. The chapter continues with some rather desultory discussion of Virginia Woolf's terror of a devouring middlebrow culture, touching on such institutions as the Book of the Month Club, *Reader's Digest*, and the *Saturday Review* itself.

The next two chapters deal respectively with gender and racial differences in texts, readers, and interpretation. "Sexing the Text: Postmodern Reading, Feminist Theory, and Ironic Agency" compares works by Vladimir Nabokov and Italo Calvino (who implicitly assume a masculine reader) with works by the avant-garde feminist writers Kathy Acker (a punk writer) and Angela Carter ("who wants her readers to engage interactively