friend." The Luddites, if that is what they were, have for the most part left the field now, and those of us who remain can scarcely imagine how we ever taught writing or carried out our own research without the computer. However, as we become more familiar with this technology and become increasingly reliant on it, we also are troubled by potential problems—for example, the expense of maintaining it and of keeping up with rapid developments. Will material on CD-ROMs still be accessible when that technology is displaced? Can we be confident, in times of financial restraints such as we now experience, that CD-ROM readers will be maintained or that information now stored on CD-ROMs will be transferred to newer forms?

Lanham argues that the computer will produce a more active/ interactive reader and create an active/interactive social community of readers and researchers. Possibly, but the question remains whether that active reader's activity will include reflection and deliberation or merely be a response to what is on the screen. And recognition that the social activity in which the computer user engages is, at times, unproductive and even antisocial is leading more and more educational institutions to limit the amount of time per week a student may spend on the Internet. (Visiting a few white power Net sites will persuade anyone that the social aspects of the computer can be frighteningly antisocial.) For some of us, computer time is being limited by the fact that our institutions are billing us for using home modems to connect with the university's mainframe. Such concerns may seem niggling in the face of the optimism and breadth of Lanham's generalizations, but they are the reality tempering all grand hopes and dreams.

Anyone searching for a vision of the future electronic library in this book will be disappointed. Apart from very general statements that online publication has great potential for the future and that books cannot be the (sole) basis for future planning of libraries and the education of librarians, Lanham has little to say. With apparent implications for the rest of us, he quotes a recommendation from a large law firm that the periodicals in its library "should be sold and replaced with their CD-ROM equivalents." How wonderful it would be, for those of us in literature, to have on searchable CD-ROMs the contents of those massive volumes of *Publications of the Modern Language Association* and other journals

> Visiting a few white power Net sites will persuade anyone that the social aspects of the computer can be frighteningly antisocial.

whose high-acid paper crumbles as we turn the pages! Would that our libraries had the budgets of large law firms!

Rhetoricians are a feisty lot, determined to assert their place in the academy—and rightly so. Lanham is certainly better at this than almost any other rhetorician with whom I have had contact. When he goes after his Curmudgeons and Luddites, he does so with impressive vigor and, at times, a bit of slipperiness, too. Will rhetoric be the means by which all intellectual enterprise will converge and permit us to live in Lanham's idealized world of oscillations and bistability? Probably not, but it is fun to watch Lanham argue the point.—*George R. Keiser, Kansas State University, Manhattan.*

Mantovani, Giuseppe. *New Communication Environments: From Everyday to Virtual.* London, England, and Bristol, Penn.: Taylor & Francis, 1996. 152p. $69.95 cloth (ISBN 0-7484-0395-7); $29.95 paper (ISBN 0-7484-0396-5). LC 96-20158.

In graduate school, I had occasion to attend a dinner party hosted by a renowned poet and critic for several of his

English department colleagues. At table, the festivities quickly settled down to that favorite of academic sports, disparaging colleagues. To a graduate student, the professors' witty contumely was as headily in-crowd as the wine fueling the proceedings was plentiful, and what struck me most about the verdicts rendered was the lavishness of their displeasure with the work not of grant-fat chemists, tycoon technocrats, or plodding engineers but, rather, of social scientists, who were, it appeared, guilty of piling up dull Himalayas of research that turned out to be nothing more than the molehills of common sense that humanity daily treads underfoot.

This conversation came to mind as I read social psychologist Mantovani's (University of Padua) short discussion of current social psychological thinking about the relationship of communication and selfhood. Relying on the work of Lee Beach, James March, Donald Norman, Marshall Sahlins, and others, Mantovani looks at "how culture and technology together shape the situations we live in and influence the development of our social and individual identities." To do so, he redirects psychology's attention away from linear and cognitive models of communication as information transfer, decision-making as rationalistic execution of plans, and identity as given and discrete toward multidimensional, dynamic, complex relations that describe the provisional, contextualized, improvisatory, contradictory aspects of identity and the historically contingent, negotiated, hermeneutic, constructed nature of social meaning.

The book's three parts revolve around part two's three-tiered model of social context. In this model, a level of tool-using (including all types of technology) involvement with the environment interacts through a second level of daily situations—at which people form goals as interpretations of their interests and opportunities—with a third level where a system of meanings (i.e., social structure) is produced by the actions people take to achieve those goals. This "symbolic order," the system that makes actions meaningful, turns back dialectically on the everyday level, however, as the limiting repertory of its possibilities. Problematizing in this way the dynamic between identity and social context, activity and symbolic order, everyday and "permanent," enables Mantovani to show how they are mutually constitutive, each establishing the conditions of possibility for the other, making and remaking each other, as do the more homely nature/nurture, chicken/egg binaries customarily invoked to conceptualize dialectical dependence and doubts about causal priority.

This model relies on part one's "situated action" theory of decision-making. According to this theory, people make (identity-creating) decisions not merely according to a so-called rationalist calculation of advantage and disadvantage in order to achieve preplanned results but, more intuitively, to achieve results appropriate to their self-image in circumstances saturated with culturally available possibilities. Part three then uses the model to investigate the social implications of three new communication environments, namely, computer-mediated communication, computer-supported work, and virtual reality.

The conclusion worries two points. One is about the future of identity in a world whose reality is increasingly the virtual one of circumstantial, fictional identities. The other is about the possibilities for theory in scholarship that focuses on the overdetermined every day, an every day whose complexity not only eludes the reductionism toward which theory tends but subverts it by immersing the "outside" of theoretical abstraction in the "inside" it would abstract. Although the former of these may speak more directly to the library community, it is part three's critique of the "limita-

tions of the network paradigm," the "myth of electronic democracy," and the "supposed role of 'shared spaces' . . . in the development of electronic altruism" that sounds cautionary notes especially close to home as librarians prepare despatialized collections for decorporealized constituencies in times when the new communities thus created will increasingly have to pay the Internet piper.

Mantovani's tone is not so energetically critical as is, for example, Neil Postman's in *Technology* or Gorman and Crawford's in *Future Libraries*. His argument, however, reminds readers of what we already know so well, namely, that the technologies we make, make us in turn; that what we make has unpredictable consequences; that no tool is inherently purposeful but, rather, takes its purposes from the field of social values; and that technologies are social and therefore political projects. Technological tools, such as personal identity, develop in engagement with an environment already conditioned by the political and social projects of people. Thus, as knowledge for Mantovani is not simply processed information, so, too, are technologies not neutral forces for progress; rather, their "cultural dimensions" require that we ask the political questions about who uses them and to what ends.

The cover blurb promises a "startling" book. To those, however, who have followed, especially through the cultural studies movement, the post-sixties development of (Continental) social/cultural theory on problems of agency, structure, subjectivity, discourse, language, power, ideology, and the every day or, for that matter, those who attend to the world around them, none of this will come as anything new, let alone startling. Readers will find the summaries in the short introduction and conclusion useful, as they will the discussion of the sociopolitical imbrications of technology; but gaining instruction from the whole may

depend not only on their reading or powers of observation but also on how they like their (virtual?) reality—in the form of the novel or social psychology, or in the imitation of fiction or description of science. That the author's most vivid evidence in part one derives from works of literature or anecdotes of student life and that he proposes to ontologize virtual reality as fiction remind me of Aristotle's assertion that poetry (roughly, literature) is more philosophical and serious than history because it is more universal. I might venture the corollary that literature, on these counts, shows itself superior to social psychology as well.—*Robert Kieft, Haverford College, Haverford, Pennsylania.*

Miller, Steven E. *Civilizing Cyberspace: Policy, Power, and the Information Superhighway.* New York: ACM Pr., 1996. 413p. $24.95. (ISBN 0-201-84760-4.) LC 95-7270.

This has been a good year for public debate about the information superhighway. Dullish topics such as telecommunications technology, regulation and licensing of public utilities, antitrust, copyright, and patent law have penetrated the consciousness of the average person, the media, and possibly even some legislators. Along with perennially exciting problems of censorship and privacy and the politics of the Supreme Court and the 104th Congress, they make an exciting agenda for democratic discussion. Steven E. Miller is one of those rare people who combine detailed knowledge of both the technical and the political sides of these issues. He has been a community organizer, editor of *Lotus Magazine*, science commentator for the TV show *One Norway Street*, and member of the national board of Computer Professionals for Social Responsibility. In *Civilizing Cyberspace*, Miller offers a valuable overview aimed at knowledgeable citizens and policymakers. "Question and Answer" sessions with experts (scien-