

"random access") produces a weak, repetitive organizational structure that works against the narrative, analytic, and polemical thrust of Miller's work. Perhaps his background as a columnist and broadcaster has conditioned him to break his material down into small chunks. And although Miller's sweetly reasonable voice contributes to the civilized tone of his book, it may not inspire the vociferous public response that he recommends. Strange as it may sound, *Civilizing Cyberspace* could have used a little more rhetoric.—*Jean Alexander, Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois.*

The Unpredictable Certainty: Information Infrastructure through 2000. Prepared by the NII 2000 Steering Committee; the Computer Science and Telecommunications Board; the Commission on Physical Sciences, Mathematics and Applications; and the National Research Council. Washington, D.C.: National Academy Pr., 1996. 281p. \$24.95. (ISBN 0-309-05432-X.) LC 96-67383.

This report represents the thinking of members of business, industry, academia, and government. It synthesizes the discussion and papers produced at a workshop in January 1995 and a forum in the spring of 1995 in Washington, D.C. These meetings were organized by a steering committee of the Information Infrastructure Task Force, acting under the direction of the Computer Science and Telecommunications Board of the National Research Council.

The mandate for the steering committee was "to access medium-term deployment of facilities and services to advance the nation's information infrastructure." The project NII 2000 sought the perspectives of providers of information and producers of facilities as well as the views of user groups.

At the beginning of the report, there is a poem by Antonio Machado, which reads:

"wanderers, your footsteps are the road, and nothing more; wanderer, there is no road, the road is made by walking."

Appropriately, these lines sum up the general outlook of those engaged in the project. In the report, there is no vision, no road, only the rarely questioned premise that private decision-making—markets—will somehow or other, sometime or other, lead to satisfactory outcomes. Desirable social outcomes hardly come into it. Technology is endorsed, not scrutinized. Its adoption is the report's "certainty." The unpredictability arises because potential individual users of the technology may be unwilling to assume their assigned roles.

And well they might, given that there is no good reason offered to indicate that people want some, or any, of the services being thrown at them. "What will the consumer really want to do with the interactive services, and how much is he willing to pay?" asks one participant.

But this uncertainty is not determining because, as the report makes clear, "business users will drive the development of information infrastructure." Yet, herein lies the contradiction that haunts the entire project. What disturbingly (to the report's authors) cannot be exorcised are the origins of what currently underpins the information infrastructure—the Internet. In the report's careful words, "It [the Internet] was built to one set of economic principles and is in transition to another set of economic principles . . ." [reviewer's emphasis].

Again, quoting the report, the Internet was constructed "according to a social benefit model." Now it is in transition to a commercial standard. Unsurprisingly, "financing for Internet access in research, education, and libraries continues to be a source of uncertainty and concern. . . ."

Project 2000's participants, working with a market frame for analysis, reject

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the "social benefit model." Government, in their view, is useful only in two ways: to reduce further the regulation of the information sector, and to undertake the considerable costs and risks of research and development of information technologies. Once these costs have been borne out of general revenues, the opportunity to profit thereby should be shifted automatically to the private sector.

One other role is seen for government—as enforcer of private interests in the international realm. This is necessary, the report concludes, because in most other nations "there is a slower pace of deregulation and privatization." What this means is that if other countries strive to defend their cultures and institutional structures, the U.S. government should not be reluctant to exercise pressure to overcome practices on behalf of national sovereignty deemed inimical to U.S. private corporate activity abroad.

This volume is a useful compendium for those seeking to understand how prevailing private power in the United States views the place of the new information technologies in the national economy. It reviews the options they offer, the obstacles to their installation they may encounter, and the opportunities for moneymaking they represent. However, the report is less helpful to those who are interested in charting a course that takes into account the multitude of social needs that might be addressed by an informed, and socially oriented, information system.—*Herbert I. Schiller, University of California-San Diego.*