

drown out any alternative voices striving for the attention of a larger national audience. The free market, transformed by the demands of corporate business logic, does not operate for the public good: it breaks down the social fiber of community, and when the market becomes global, it breaks down the legitimate authority of the state.

This book, although not Schiller at his best, deserves a wide audience among academic librarians of all stripes, especially those in smaller, nonresearch libraries with limited budgets for collection development. He explains very well how the corporate free market and its particular ideology work to limit information available for a national discourse. Schiller correctly identifies, as have Buchanan and Gingrich, that "Cultural, media, and informational issues already are, and increasingly will be, centers of social dispute." Academic librarians, as culture managers, can and must play a role in this social struggle if their libraries are to remain centers of true research and scholarship.

Schiller's style and the book's organization are more typical of a series of introductory lectures than a tightly structured argument. Consequently, the reader must work hard for clarity in certain areas. It is troubling that such an important book has no bibliography and that the index is minimal, chiefly limited to proper nouns. Concepts such as "ideology" and "hegemony" are used in the text without descriptions or even brief definitions. With a more thorough index, the reader could massage the text for a clearer understanding of such subjects.

Schiller does provide sufficient documentation to support his arguments throughout. Endnotes follow each chapter but, on occasion, are less than ideal. For example, note 11 in chapter 5 gives the reference "Gore speech." A close reading of the section surrounding the note gives clues to chase it down. (Notes like this, however, are one of the things

that make being a reference librarian fun.) Still, despite these mechanical shortcomings, the book is worth reading. Indeed, it is a welcome introduction to a crucial area in the sociology/anthropology of information.—Noel D. Young, *Rehoboth, Massachusetts*.

**Webster, Frank.** *Theories of the Information Society*. London: Routledge (International Library of Sociology), 1995. 257p. \$17.95. (ISBN 0-415-10574-9.) LC 94-49029.

The central question in this book by a professor of sociology at Oxford Brookes University is whether the information society in which we now live is a new kind of society, different in character from any previous society, or whether it is basically just an "informatized" version of a familiar old kind of society. This sounds as if it ought to matter to information professionals, who could be expected to benefit from occupying a strategic position in a novel kind of society. Webster's book will do nothing to encourage such hopes; he is skeptical of any claim of novelty for the information society.

He begins by reviewing, and quickly dismissing, accounts of the transition to a new type of society that are expressed in terms of quantitative increases in information technology, information production, information occupations, information transfer, or exposure to media culture. He turns for illumination on the significance of information in modern society to a variety of social theories and theorists. Few of these are explicitly concerned with the idea of an information society, but all are relevant in various ways. Daniel Bell's theory of a post-industrial society gets sharply criticized. Herbert Schiller's critique of the dominance of market criteria and corporate self-interest in information development, and of class inequalities in access to information, gets a very sympathetic exposition. So does Anthony Giddens's account of the nation-state's longstanding

interest in surveillance, fueled in large part by military concerns. Juergen Habermas's story of a once-thriving, but now threatened public sphere of disinterested rational debate is told briefly and then followed by an account of recent financial squeezes on British radio, public television, public libraries, museums, and government information services. A chapter is devoted to discussion of recent economic changes, contrasting the "Fordist" period 1945-1973 with the subsequent "post-Fordist" era, characterized by globalization of markets, finance, production, and other restructurings (e.g., downsizing and outsourcing); this discussion is based on work by what is known as the Regulation School, but the phenomena discussed are all familiar. From this we move on to theories of postmodernism and the views of Jean Baudrillard, J. F. Lyotard, and (very briefly) Mark Poster, David Harvey, and a few others. Finally, Manuel Castells's concept of the informational city is explained, emphasizing sharp class contrasts between globally oriented information workers and locally oriented service workers and ghetto inhabitants.

In Webster's view, the accounts of postindustrial society, postmodernism, and the information city (actually the "information mode of development" that figures in Castells's theory) support the idea of a new type of society resulting from information developments, whereas others, especially Schiller, Giddens, and Habermas, favor the claim that there has been no sharp break but, rather, development continuous with the past.

Webster is firmly on the "no sharp break" side: there is no question about a pervasive "informatization" of life, but there is no warrant for talk of a radically new kind of society. Why not? Webster just finds the continuity story more plausible than the sharp break story, and denies that the case has been made for a break or, what is somewhat different, for the appearance of a new type of society.

Webster's arguments are often suspect. When at the beginning he dismissed quantitative accounts of a transition to a new kind of society, it apparently was because no one could tell him exactly how much change it took to make a new society—exactly how much more information, exactly how many more people in information occupations. But where did he get the idea that gradual quantitative change can never result in major qualitative change without there being any particular point at which the change occurs? (One grows old, but there need be no exact point in time at which one becomes old.) Unless he is going to deny the possibility of gradual evolution of new species, it is hard to see why the absence of a clearly defined sharp break settles any questions about the informational society. (And if he does deny that possibility, why should anybody follow him?) There is another and even more bothersome recurrent argument Webster uses against proponents of a new type of society. He repeatedly accuses people such as Bell and Castells of technological determinism, which he thinks is obviously a serious intellectual crime. They think that technological change has led to major social change; why is that so wrong? Webster's (implicit) argument seems to be this: If you think that technological change ever leads to major social change, you must think that it always does and that nothing else ever does. Obviously, Bell and Castells do not have to think any such thing, but Webster's apparent belief that they do has devastating effects on his own position. He is helpless in dealing with technological change.

So Webster does not have much to offer in support of his argument that the information society is no new kind of society. But might he not be right all the same? Let us review the situation. Everyone is agreed on the pervasive "informatization" of society, it appears; the argument is over whether to call the information society a new stage in an old process or a new kind

of society. But that argument just cannot get off the ground unless we have some way of distinguishing new "stages" from new "kinds." But we do not appear to have any agreed ways of doing that, and so two commentators can describe the same social situation as enormously different from the past but only a new stage or, alternatively, as the beginnings of a new kind. The thing to do might be to put a moratorium on this particular argument and tell the parties to come back when they have proposals about how best to distinguish stages from kinds, and why we should care. On reflection, one wonders why information professionals should care, unless they can be shown reason for thinking the difference between stage and kind is a big deal and one that makes a difference to them.—Patrick Wilson, *University of California, Berkeley*.

**Wilder, Stanley J.** *The Age Demographics of Academic Librarians: A Profession Apart*. Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1995. 88p. \$30.00. (ISBN 0-918006-77-5.)

Authored by Stanley J. Wilder, assistant dean for technical and financial services at Louisiana State University Libraries, the purpose of the report is to: (1) compare the age demographics of academic librarians to the age demographics of members of comparable professions, (2) examine the dramatic increase in age of librarians between 1990 and 1994, and (3) project the retirement rates of academic librarians over the next twenty-five years. Additionally, the author wanted to explore the possible explanations for, and implications of, his discovery that academic librarians tend to be older than their counterparts in comparable professions.

If you are like me, you are probably initially wondering why this information is important and what the implications of an older workforce for the profession might be. Wilder examined librarian age differences for different job categories;

among minority group members, library administrators, and librarians working different regions; and in public and private institutions. He suggests that the age demographics information will have implications for workforce planning, recruitment, automation, and outsourcing.

Wilder relies primarily on data obtained from the Association of Research Libraries' (ARL) salary surveys for 1990 and 1994, and ARL statistics from 1963-91 and 1992-94; indeed, the subtitle of the report is *A Report Based on Data from the ARL Annual Salary Survey*. However, the appendices reveal that he also analyzed data obtained from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and from the Association of Library and Information Science Education (ALISE). The author makes good use of the ARL statistics by conducting a secondary analysis of the data and by supplementing the analyses with additional material from ALISE and CPS.

The first purpose of Wilder's research was to examine the age of librarians as compared to members of comparable professions. The U.S. government-defined, comparable professions are derived from the *Standard Occupational Classification Manual*. This professional specialty group includes librarians, physicians, professors, teachers, lawyers, and social workers, among more than 100 other professions. The author found that librarians tended to be older than members of these other professions. There was an underrepresentation of young people and an overrepresentation of librarians in the 45-49 age group. Wilder states that during the 1960s there was a dramatic increase in the number of students attending higher education institutions. This increased population required an increase in staff at colleges and universities, including more academic librarians. Of lesser consequence is the banishment of a mandatory retirement age for college faculty. Academic librarians with faculty status also are exempt from mandatory retirement.