

Book Reviews

Margaret Rohdy, Editor

From Carnegie to Internet2: Forging the Serials Future: Proceedings of the North American Serials Interest Group, Inc.: 14th Annual Conference, June 10–13, 1999. Ed. P. Michelle Fiander, Joseph C. Harmon, and Jonathan David Makepeace. New York: Haworth Information Pr., 2000. 398p. \$69.95 (ISBN 0-7890-1007-0); \$39.95 paper, (ISBN 0-7890-1035-6). LC00-23223.

The North American Serials Interest Group (NASIG) is unusual among library organizations because it is completely independent, unaffiliated with any other body. It is also catholic in its membership, embracing anyone interested in the serials world—librarians, publishers, subscription agents, system vendors. There are no institutional or corporate members, so all players are equal. The result has been a dynamic, productive organization that has gained respect in all corners of the industry. Its annual conferences have become known as good places for frank and interesting discussions, both formal and informal, of serials-related issues. Haworth Press has published the NASIG proceedings since their beginning, both in *The Serials Librarian* and, as its standard practice, as monograph separates.

The NASIG conference mixes plenary speeches on general subjects, given by industry leaders, with practical workshops conducted by NASIG members. In recent conferences, the plenary sessions have become more general and visionary, less focused on serials and more on the new information society. This trend continues in the 1999 conference, with a particularly good essay by Stephen Abram, a

vice president of the Canadian firm Micromedia. He enumerates ten trends in the new information economy and ten strategies for success. This might seem outside the traditional scope of serials work, but it reflects how the work of serialists has expanded in the last ten years. His thoughts make interesting reading even for librarians not involved with the serials chain.

Balancing the visionary talks are NASIG's many practical, serials-focused workshops that mine the broad and varied talents of NASIG's membership. While focused on local examples, NASIG workshops tend to transcend the "how we done it good" genre and provide insights that can be more broadly applied. The workshop topics show how NASIG's focus has changed with the times. Many of the workshops present practical advice for handling the rise of electronic serials and databases. Electronic acquisitions methods were one major focus: there were workshops on bundling and aggregation, consortial licensing, push technology, and desktop article delivery. At a licensing workshop, participants found real examples to critique and a discussion of the major pitfalls of licenses.

On the other hand, some topics defy the passage of time. A popular workshop featured a panel discussion by two subscription agents, a publisher, and a librarian on classic serials acquisitions questions: direct vs. agency orders, handling unsolicited material, switching from print to electronic versions. Most of the questions might have been asked five years earlier, and some even at the first NASIG conference in 1986. Another workshop focused on the preservation chal-

lenges of serials that are still mostly printed on acidic paper, decades after preservation awareness became common in libraries.

Between the plenary sessions and workshops are a series of "issues sessions." These are case studies and broader discussions of current topics that occupy a useful middle ground between the theoretical plenaries and the practicality of the workshops. Most of the 1999 sessions focused on electronic issues. Several publishers described projects they had undertaken and what they had learned from them. A diverse group of presenters tackled licensing issues from each party's perspective. There is an intriguing set of talks on advertising in scholarly journals, with a communications professor arguing in favor and a giant scientific journal publisher sounding notes of caution.

A few sessions highlighted planning and management skills for librarians. Mary Devlin, a professional communication specialist, presented an issue session on nonverbal communication in the work environment. Two librarians from Maryland conducted a preconference on scenario building as an alternative to strategic planning for libraries. Library directors Glorianna St. Clair of Carnegie Mellon University and Rush Miller of the University of Pittsburgh spoke of the ACRL Redefining Scholarship Project, an attempt to describe and validate the research done by academic librarians. The interest in these sessions also underscores the wide-ranging and far-sighted interests of serialists.

The publication lag for any proceedings volume can date material quickly. NASIG's material is not

immune; in fact, it can illustrate how quickly some things change. Jean Hirons of the Library of Congress and Les Hawkins of the National Serials Data Program presented one of the first discussions of the proposed changes in the definition of “seriality” at NASIG in 1998. The proposal moved forward quickly and is now well known and accepted in the serials community. The 1999 NASIG workshop, however, still presents a succinct and clear summary of the proposal. Similarly, the preconference on metadata might seem less relevant now that there have been many articles and larger workshops on the topic, but the NASIG report is still a good, straightforward introduction to metadata.

The special feature of the annual NASIG proceedings, as opposed to the rest of the serial literature, is its careful blend of theory and practice. NASIG’s program planning committee has perfected the mixture of the two, while maintaining the generally high quality of the presentations. This makes the NASIG proceedings one of the few library science annuals actually worth reading every year.—*Bob Persing (persing@pobox.upenn.edu), University of Pennsylvania Libraries, Philadelphia*

From Gutenberg to the Global Information Infrastructure: Access to Information in the Networked World. By Christine L. Borgman. Digital Libraries and Electronic Publishing. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Pr., 2000. 324p. \$42 (ISBN 0-262-02473-X).

An outpouring of titles about the “D” word—digital libraries, digital publishing, digital technologies, digitizing for preservation, digital materials, etc.—gluts the professional literature. Readers have a right to ask why we need this book too, which is about digital libraries even if it doesn’t use the “D” word in its title. The answer is twofold: first, it is eminently readable; and, second, it takes a step back from

the fray, aiming to assess the larger picture into which all the large and small individual digital initiatives might fit. *From Gutenberg to the Global Information Infrastructure* pulls together what we know now about the world of networked information systems with what research and intuition lead us to anticipate in the future. The author attempts to integrate what we know about technology, human behavior, and policy regarding access to information.

Borgman begins with definitions. First, she defines digital libraries as both “a set of electronic resources and associated technical capabilities for creating, searching, and using information” and an entity “constructed—collected and organized—by [and for] a community of users” (42). Then, she seeks to enlarge the reader’s vision still further as well as to match it with the complexity of the real world, stating, “I propose ‘global digital library’ as a construct to encompass digital libraries that are connected to, and accessible through, a global information infrastructure. A global digital library would not be a single entity, nor would it be controlled by any single organization” (52). The words are straightforward and clear; the ideas are compelling and reflect with ease the diversity—some might say chaos—that now characterizes our professional environment.

In the first four chapters, Borgman defines and explains the basic elements of the GII (Global Information Infrastructure), and explores relationships among them: chapter 1, “The Premise and the Promise of a Global Information Infrastructure”; chapter 2, “Is It Digital or Is It a Library? Digital Libraries and Information Infrastructure”; chapter 3, “Access to Information”; and chapter 4, “Books, Bytes, and Behavior.” As their titles suggest, chapter 1 defines what is meant by GII and explains how it might be expected to function; chapter 2 describes digital

libraries as both document collections (using “document” generically) and systems in which users interact with the documents, much like libraries are both discrete collections of materials and systems in which users interact with those materials; chapter 3 covers familiar territory about methods of providing access to information, including the latest metadata schemas; and chapter 4, on electronic publishing, technology, and institutions, examines the life cycle of information and how developing technologies and society’s institutions affect it.

Chapters 5 and 6, “Why Are Digital Libraries Hard to Use?” and “Making Digital Libraries Easier to Use,” contain the central core of ideas for which the first four chapters prepare the reader. Here Borgman lays out her principal theses. Digital libraries were not easy to use in the past; but, now, design must aim for ease of use. She says, “The audience for digital libraries has changed radically since the early days of information retrieval, from expert search intermediaries to ‘every citizen’ who has access to the network. The next generation of digital libraries must serve a large and diverse community and provide a large and diverse collection of information resources” (141). Research and development can do more than address today’s problems. Chapter 7 outlines “a research agenda for making the next generation of digital libraries better suited to people’s information-related behavior in work, education, and leisure contexts” (166–67). Four trends provide the skeleton around which research should develop: (1) availability of full-text databases, not just bibliographic data, and (2) linked, not stand-alone, systems; (3) systems that require users to navigate, not just perform simple searches; and (4) concentrating on group processes and social context, not merely the individual user’s search behavior. Borgman sees a “fundamental challenge of balancing the need for