and the institution benefited from—national research and development policies throughout World War II and the Cold War, adding complexity to the antiwar turmoil on this particular campus. Yet all in all, MIT and Johnson acquitted themselves better than many institutions during those turbulent times.

After leaving the presidency, Johnson spent 12 active years as chair of the MIT Corporation, to my knowledge, the only full-time chairmanship of a higher education governing board. He also served for five of those years as president of the Boston Museum of Fine Arts, overseeing a period of growth and increasing openness.

Howard Johnson's memoirs are a tale of the American Dream come alive. Yet he recounts his academic career modestly, presenting the reader with a straightforward record of accomplishments, frustrations and turbulence. Johnson describes MIT's incredibly strong alumni network in industry, government and academia in the United States and abroad. He also connects readers to his family, his friendships—some sustained over many years—and his colleagues, without resorting to name-dropping.

Moreover, Johnson, while not himself a scholar, understood the academic enterprise and the people who comprise it. His years as president and corpora-

tion chair have left a profound mark on MIT. Long after the turmoil of the 1960s, MIT, more than many other universities, takes institutional issues seriously, addresses problems and finds and implements solutions. Witness, for example, the university's recent candor in assessing the status of women at MIT—an issue on which Johnson took pioneering steps.

Holding the Center is more than a recounting of a professional life in academe. It is a full story of a man's life, recounted with grace and warmth.

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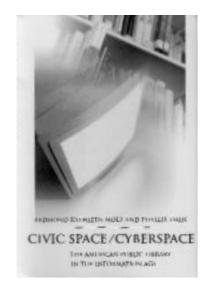
Cyber-Libraries
Alan R. Earls

Civic Space/Cyberspace: The American Public Library in the Information Age, Redmond Kathleen Molz and Phyllis Dain, MIT Press, 1999, $30

With the explosive proliferation of the Internet in this decade, the public library has faced an unexpected though perhaps not unwelcome challenge to its mission as the primary purveyor of "information" to the broad public outside academia. In *Civic Space/Cyberspace*, authors Redmond Kathleen Molz and Phyllis Dain, both of Columbia University, trace the chain of events that brought us the public library of today and offer observations relative to the institution's place in the era of the Internet.

Too bad the focus and content of *Civic Space/Cyberspace* do not fulfill the title's apparent promise of prescriptions for the future; only in the book's closing sections do Molz and Dain offer a glimpse of the road ahead.

Civic Space/Cyberspace does provide a concise, coherent and readable account of the growth of American public libraries from the 19th century to the present, with some special attention to the influence of technology. And the story features a number of New England regional characters eminent in the early development of libraries. Consider the ever-prescient MIT dean Vannevar Bush predicting in the July 1945 issue of the *Atlantic Monthly* that future scholars would be equipped with a device he dubbed the Memex, which would instantly connect them with the information they needed.

CIVIC SPACE/CYBERSPACE

THE AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY
IN THE INFORMATION AGE

The ubiquitous modem-equipped personal computer comes stunningly close to this vision.

But the major skein in *Civic Space/Cyberspace* is the argument over what a library ought to be and whom it should serve.

Molz and Dain note that the library achieved its familiar modern form in the 19th century under the influence of bourgeois values, with just a touch of populism thrown in. The library's stated ideology was usually highly democratic. But while the common touch has become ever more apparent—large collections of popular fiction and video tapes, for example—libraries still serve an elite audience, mainly the educated and the comparatively well off.

This mismatch between democratic ideals and elitist reality has produced a number of movements over the years intended to revitalize or refocus libraries, particularly toward the needs of the inner city and underserved minorities. Many

of these efforts were accelerated from the 1960s through the 1980s as traditional middle-class patrons moved to the suburbs, forcing the nation's major municipal libraries to rebuild their political support and redefine their function.

Now come the challenges of the Information Age. The most daunting is the question of what role librarians should play in providing patron access to and/or censorship of the Internet. The issue of censorship has invaded libraries before, most notably during the 1950s. But with virtually unlimited and ever-changing content available universally over the Internet, at virtually no cost, control of library content is now at best little more than a futile political gesture. Still, such gestures can gain support as librarians and others discovered with the passage of the short-lived Communications Decency Act of 1996. And there are continued local attempts to have content, for children at least, filtered by librarians.

Much of the book focuses on possible incremental changes in future library operations that new technology may permit—and relies, logically, on the presumption that individuals will continue to be "bandwidth-limited" in the future—a scenario that is hard to credit given the enormous strides being made monthly in this area of technology.

Civic Space/Cyberspace may not provide a futurist's look at tomorrow's libraries. But Molz and Dain have succeeded in providing an excellent primer on the social, political and economic forces shaping the public library—no matter how rapidly technology evolves.

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