effect the equipment? For example, is CD-ROM technology useful in a tropical climate without the use of air conditioning? Careful planning will be necessary to prevent disasters.

We must lessen the gap between the information rich and the information poor — between countries and within nations. Electronic technology can be an appropriate equalizing factor, or a tool of the rich. If we withdraw from or try to ignore electronic means, we will lose the opportunity to use these very powerful tools for progressive ends.

Having read Al Kagan's essay, I am torn by two conflicting responses. The first is to applaud his determination to grab hold of these new resources and make them sources of democratic and critical resistance. My second response is to cringe at his acceptance of information technology as tabula rasa on which we are (relatively) free to write our own script.

I have argued elsewhere that librarianship is uncritically accepting information technology resources to the detriment of long-standing professional values (Reference Librarian, issue 31 and American Libraries, December 1990). Furthermore, there is a large body of critical literature which tells us that any technology is not neutral: it comes from a social, political, and economic context which is built right into the structure of that technology right from the start. In the case of information technologies, John Durham Peters notes that the origins of information theory, the programs to create / manipulate information, and the development of the hardware were products of the Cold War military (Journal of Communication Inquiry, 12 (2), 1988). Information technology resources, like television or nuclear power plants, have a "hidden curriculum" or, if you prefer, a "subtext" that must be identified.

Librarians have, for a long time now, blithely overlooked just these kinds of issues. Herbert Schiller has documented the corporate context and influence of information production (see his Culture Inc., 1989 and essay with Anita Schiller in The Politics of Information, 1982). We are not yet seriously grappling with the issue of just how these new resources are affecting what we collect as John Haar suggests (Reference Librarian, issue 22.) The next step will bring us even more of the same electronic texts and perhaps we will "collect" electronic books. Eugene Provenezo (in Literacy Online, 1992) and Peters have both suggested that the archiving of the "real" record and the "original text" may be irrelevant. Further, the ability to truly change, edit, censor that text without traces of the original suggest real and serious difficulties with the library's mission of providing both a
history and current information. “The resistance of texts to interpretation, and their power to engender many and conflicting readings, evaporates when they become information .... Information lacks history” (Peters).

I do not mean to bombard the issue with citations to writings which tell us that the game is lost already. My point is that if we are to seize the possibilities of information technology, we must develop a critical intellectual stance towards it. I have touched on only a few among many sources of critical scholarship of use to or relevant to librarianship. There must be a real critical scholarship to address information technology. Schiller outlined what “Critical Research in the Information Age” would address: production (vs. consumption) of information; sources of power in communication / information processes; and historical context of information and its technology (Journal of Communication 33, Summer 1983).

My two possible reactions to Kagan’s essay are not really in conflict. The two must work together: a grounded critique of information technology in libraries must exist for librarians to effectively impose a progressive agenda on them. To do otherwise is to fall into a version of the wide habit I have identified: librarians use the acquisition and “mastery” of information technologies to improve the age-old “status” and “image” problem. Without a grounded critique, the unexamined faith in technology remains the same, the intentions are just better.