here has read because its 40,000 pages long and deliberately impenetrable, one of the subtexts in the legislation was to make sure that cyberspace is a corporate property. I think the Internet is a fabulous thing, e-mail is a terrific aid, but that bill tells us that the Internet is not something that's going to maintain its integrity all by itself. (Robert McChesney of the University of Wisconson is someone important to read on this point.) It's very important, it seems to me, that the citizens of this country know who owns the media, and know the consequences of the concentration of ownership, and not get lost in the latest hype over technological utopia. The only way to do that is going to happen is through the schools, libraries, religious arenas, through the labor unions...it ain't gonna happen through the media!

Response to Mark Crispin Miller
by John Buschman

I tend, in the main, to agree with Dr. Miller, and I would like to bring some of his issues closer yet to librarianship. I think there has been a culture change, both generally and specifically, within our profession. For instance, ALA's policy manual lists all kinds of policies which drive us into action and drive us into at least studying and publicizing what we've been talking about. For instance, the "Library Bill of Rights" (Policy 53.1) states that: "Libraries should provide materials and information presenting all points of view on current and historical issues. Materials should not be proscribed or removed because of partisan or doctrinal disapproval." That idea is repeated about three or four more times in the text of other access and in preservation policies. That position alone should drive librarians into some form of activism. However, it is not a secret that ALA is trying to finesse the role of social activism, developed in the sixties and seventies based on these policies, in light of a new economic "realism" and the dominant sponsoring culture of our field which has just been thoroughly presented.

Dr. Miller has picked up and carried forward the work of a wonderful scholar, Ben Bagdikian who wrote in the 1970s and throughout the 1980s in the same vein. I'd like to read a quote from something he wrote almost ten years ago:

> The global media oligopoly is not visible to the eye of the
> consumer. Newsstands still display rows of newspapers

and magazines in a dazzling variety of colors and subjects. Bookstores and libraries still offer miles of shelves stocked with individual volumes. Throughout the world, broadcasting cable channels continue to multiply, as do videocassettes and music recordings in dozens of languages. But if this bright kaleidoscope suddenly disappeared and was replaced by the corporate colophons of those who own this output the collage would go gray with the names of the few media multi-nationals that now command that field.

This trend has been known in our profession for a long time. For instance, John Haar has been writing for over a decade about how electronic resources tend to sway our collecting patterns. Let's face it, what the kids use, what the students use, what is popular is what we tend to select for our collections. Haar has noted that the popularity of those new electronic resources drives our patterns of collecting. Our institutions do have a curriculum, be they a public library or academic, and we try to respond to what is our curriculum. Too often, popularity has become our curriculum.

Charles Willett published a study in 1992 that talked about libraries' over-reliance on review mechanisms, which focus almost exclusively on mainstream publishers and mainstream book distributors. He noted that there is an institutionalized hesitation to purchase alternative materials for libraries. We tend to want the *Choice* review or the stamp of approval of appearing in *New York Times Book Review* or *Booklist* or *Publishers Weekly*. Those are very narrowing mechanisms. Further, book distribution is essentially dominated by two or three large firms in our field. What they choose to provide quick access to is probably the key. How many of us have hesitated okaying an order because we know it's going to give our order department and business office, and clerical staff fits because it's not put out by Yale University Press or HarperCollins? It happens every day. The library systems that we purchase, our bread-and-butter online catalogs, are increasingly owned by corporate giants or those fake nonprofits like OCLC or CARL or RLIN. There is virtually no distinction that I can tell between the large library nonprofit cooperatives and a for-profit institution anymore. They all aggressively market their services, they all aggressively develop products, absorb new ones from other companies, sell spin-offs. Their behavior is basically identical. Roughly 30 percent of our library systems are now owned by some sort of corporate, or quasi-corporate vendor like Ameritech and whoever owns CARL and UNCover now. A

good example is the British on-line company who purchased Knight-Ridder (a major database vendor), who also was the parent company of CARL (a former non-profit) and its UNCover company, who now owns Dialog and DataStar. Even within our own little world, we're facing exactly the same kind of media concentration that Dr. Miller has noted in a broader context. I hope that everyone realizes by now that consolidation of ownership and the selling off by associations of their in-house journal publishing activities is what led to the journal inflation that libraries have been facing for the past 15 years.

Electronic information products in libraries are becoming ever more like broadcast media in ways other than ownership. We all know that our CD-ROM indexes, the Internet, our video collections, have gotten more and more visually appealing to catch the eye. Was there anything really wrong with the old versions? No, but now we now have a Windows version that gets us into more complicated, sexy forms of searching via some sort of flashy graphic designed to pull you into a zone of advertising. As near as I can tell, multimedia encyclopedias basically try to combine nature and science TV programs and lots of sound and color pictures with the old *Encyclopedia Britannica.* They're designed to catch the eye. In fact, there's an old article in *American Libraries* called "Electronic Products Designed to Capture the MTV Generation." I think that pretty much says it all, and it's our fault if we don't take professional responsibility and let media flash influence our collecting and service decisions too much. It is worth noting that we don't own electronic output, we don't control its archival quality or integrity, and we pay for access to the same information repeatedly – furthering our already considerable budget problems.

Libraries as institutions are pushed more and more to become like Barnes and Noble, and Walden Books, and Borders. We're being pushed to install coffee bars, to get the really snazzy covered magazines, and have comfortable chairs. We have to think about what we're facing. In order to stay relevant, we must market a nonprofit institution that was originally founded in the public good. That's a horrific thing to say and it's a horrific thing for us to have to justify ourselves that way. A little bit might be good for us, but we're responding to the economic culture by me-too-ing. There's a tremendous amount of hype in support of that culture out there. I'll quote one of the best examples of that hype from John Perry Barlow, one of the Electronic Frontier Foundation guys. A couple of years ago he said, "we're in the middle of the most transforming, technological event since the capture of fire. I used to think it was just the biggest thing since Gutenberg,

but now I think you have to go back farther." I don't know that we have always responded well to the tremendous amount of social hype and social pressure on our institutions. We have tried to position ourselves as info-navigators and the really best and smartest surfers on the web.

I agree with Dr. Miller: libraries have an innate connection to books and print literacy. I don't think what many of us are contemplating will really be a library in the future. To reprise an oft-cited historical analogy, all the blacksmiths didn't go work at Akron Tire and Rubber, they went away. Maybe that will be our fate if the economy and culture is going to digitize, and sell, and market all information individually. We're struggling with fair use and privacy issues in an environment not of our making, and we're responding in ways that really disturb me. It was proposed about a year and a half ago in a *Library Journal* article that we maybe stop thinking about the privacy of circulation records, and instead use and work that data to market and target our services to our local communities or campuses more specifically. In other words, libraries would be the nonprofit add-on to Wilson, Psych-lit, MLA, Alta Vista, etc. I have serious trouble with that, and I have serious trouble with us not being an oppositional professional voice to what's going on. We need to retain some fundamental character of the 19th century institution that finally embraced intellectual freedom.

Last, but not least, there's Microsoft. Read *The Road Ahead.* Bill Gates didn't make any bones about what he wants. He's said it over and over again: he wants his software running a computer to be the toaster, the VCR, the internal combustion engine all rolled together for the twenty-first century. Microsoft is aggressively putting its products into our institutions. I'm not ideologically pure, if he came along and gave us a couple of NT servers I'd take them. We've actually spent money on them, and they're not terrible products. What I worry about is his voracious appetite for content. He already has a teacher education pre-packaged program and he affects the fair use doctrine by his financial ability to enforce his version of copyright through the courts. That may be what is going to be the determining factor in fair use rules for images, which he digitally distributes. I see our field as very conflicted because we love the software giveaways, we love the fact that Gates called that splashy news conference and appeared next to ALA leaders, and told us all that we were going to update our libraries and become the bridge to the twenty-first century. But there's a tremendous monopolizing and homogenizing force behind that kind of power, and I worry about our relationship to that. I especially worry

that we're repositioning the profession to such a degree that we're going to lose our basis of opposition. For us to be info-entrepreneurs, there's no room for intellectual freedom, there's no room for archival integrity, there's no room for democratic information provision. We've never accomplished that job perfectly, nor will we ever do it completely, but libraries are one of the few places left where that is happening at all. I got a little angry when I re-read Dr. Miller's articles. I don't know that ALA is always serving us well in how it responds to the issues we've discussed today, and ALA's corporate culture is increasing. I think we should step back from the hype and quit worrying about some 15 or 16 year old kid with a network connection taking our jobs away from us. We should just do our jobs, and I suspect that librarianship will be around for a good long time to fulfill the role Dr. Miller sees for us.

Editor's note: This is an edited transcript of a panel presentation and follow-up discussion at the 1998 American Library Association Annual Conference in Washington, D.C. The panel was organized by Steven Harris. Robert J. Lackie prepared the transcription.

The WTO and the Threat to Libraries

by Fiona Hunt

How many of you here today would prefer not to buy products made with child labor? How many would prefer not to eat food treated with hormones? Even if you don't care about these things yourself, do you think that people should have the right to make these choices?

The WTO would like to take away that right, and has done so already in a number of cases.

According to the WTO, countries cannot discriminate against a product based on its method of production, even if the same standards are applied to domestic as well as foreign products. Such discrimination constitutes a "non-tariff trade barrier."

For instance, in 1988, the US passed a law banning the sale of tuna caught using "purse seine" nets, nets which injure and kill dolphins as they catch the tuna. This law is applied to domestic tuna as well as imported. Even so it has been ruled WTO-illegal as a barrier to trade. Similarly, a ban against shrimp caught in nets that injure sea turtles was overturned by the WTO. The US ban fell under the US Endangered Species Act as well as satisfying US obligations under the global environmental treaty CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species). Despite these facts, it was deemed a non-tariff barrier to trade.

Where food safety is concerned, the WTO contends that unless a product is scientifically proven to be unsafe, it should not be discriminated against in trade. Countries should assess what they consider a "tolerable" risk. Many countries prefer to adopt a "zero tolerance" attitude and wait until the product has been proven safe to ensure ultimate safety for their citizens. Such a stance constitutes a WTO non-tariff barrier to trade. For instance: Since 1988, the European Union has had a ban on the sale of domestic and imported beef treated with bovine growth hormone. Bovine growth hormone is suspected as a possible cause of cancer as well as premature pubescence in girls. It has not been absolutely proven, but the EU has