

are valuable starting points, but the book as a whole fails to accomplish this goal.—*Kurt De Belder, New York University.*

Collard, Claude, Isabelle Giannattasio and Michel Melot. *Les Images dans les bibliothèques.* Paris: Editions du Cercle de la Librairie, 1995. 390p. (ISBN 2-7654-0577-8, ISSN 0184-0886.)

All the world, by some accounts, is fast becoming images. Text has long been digitized. Sound has long been digitized. Visual images themselves, which have been available as bits as long as have the others, now at last are becoming available to the general online world thanks to the World Wide Web. The end result of all this effort has been the creation of images: images of text, images of other images, multimedia applications using sound and text and graphics, and much more. If nothing else, the hours that we all spend now in front of video screens are making us very aware of images.

There is an accompanying suspicion, however, that a world preoccupied with image is a world become superficial. An image, some feel, somehow bears less validity or significance than "reality." Much criticism of the entertainment value of images stems from this suspicion. The hold of television and video games on the consumer imagination is criticized for contributing to such superficiality: entertaining images that should—but many feel do not—have something more real underneath.

The controversy that accompanies the collection of images, particularly their collection by an icon of established culture such as a library, is more understandable if it is considered in conjunction with this suspicion of images. Libraries perennially have assembled vast image collections: illustrations accompanying text inside printed books and illuminated manuscripts, images standing alone assembled into books or preserved in various other media. By the modern, digital definition, library contents—text and

all—might even be seen to be nothing more, or less, than giant collections of images.

Michel Melot presents a masterful analysis of the many issues involved in this complex and convoluted picture in *Les Images dans les bibliothèques*. Melot is the former curator of the prints collection of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*, was the first head of the Pompidou Center's *Bibliothèque Publique d'Information*, and currently is President of the *Conseil Supérieur des Bibliothèques*. He is an accomplished author and a recognized expert on prints and images. This book, which contains the contributions of three authors, is at once a handbook of library procedures for the treatment of images, an essay on the particular French approach which views library problems as processes rather than objects (French librarians think of documentation and collection more than they do of books and serials), and, thanks to Melot's essays, a trenchant piece of sociological and semiological investigation into the precise meaning of the term *image*.

Melot's introduction sketches the distinctions that others have drawn around the concepts of image, sign, language, and writing, and the differences and relationships he sees among them. His erudition on the subject is impressive: fans of semiology, structuralism, linguistics, and cognitive studies will not be disappointed, yet readers unfamiliar with or usually uninterested in these arcane areas also will have their understanding of "images" much deepened by Melot's analysis.

The first part of the book, "Documents and Their Users," covers image reproduction, uses and users, and "the great collections." The second part of the book, "Managing the Fixed Image," addresses the practical topics: collections, conservation and restoration, reproductions, documentation, communication and services. The book's third part concerns the particular problems of motion pictures:

their collection, handling, documentation, and communication.

Each of the book's three central sections emphasizes history and includes many lists of resources and statistics, both French and foreign. The introductions provided to the at-best Byzantine realm of French legal regulation of images and their description, and of subjects such as copyright and the *dépôt légal*, will be much appreciated by both French and foreign initiates to these areas. I myself was particularly interested by the book's third section, with its reproduction of the documents now actually in use to describe and organize the fast-growing library world of moving images.

Busy librarians seeking useful applications of the general case will find in the later sections numerous "practical" examples to consider, just as specialists enmeshed in their particular portion of detail in the later sections may find relief in an excursion into Melot's prose.

Melot's elegant conclusion succinctly and pungently summarizes both the fears and the possibilities attending the general subject: "*l'image est paresseuse*," "*l'image est trompeuse*," "*l'image est dangereuse*": (the image is lazy, deceptive, and dangerous). Melot might be describing a lover—which perhaps he is, for him and for his readers. "For many," says Melot, "the image is still a place of passion—opposed to writing, which is considered a place of reason." The question of the inclusion of images in libraries is purely "academic." He asserts, "The image inhabits the book and therefore the library" but "The image has been dogged by a moral discourse which has denounced its failings, without proving them . . . one might as well, with Plato, condemn all poetry and art."

Melot turns the tables, ultimately, on both the critics and some defenders of the image by asking, "The image, universal language?" He goes on to say, "The internationalization of economic, scientific and cultural commerce without doubt is at the source of the inflation of images. The important thing is to teach everyone to use them. It is here that one finds the mediator role of the librarian . . . far from being a free and universal language, the image never is free of all code . . . better to continue neither to confound images with reality, nor to present them as truths somehow fallen from the sky."

The book is intriguing and challenging. It is a necessity for anyone wishing to understand the place of images in libraries in France today, and it is at least of great interest to anyone anywhere who is interested in images at all. It would be helped by an index, and particularly, by a glossary of its many technical art, photography, and imaging terms.

The authors have supplied plentiful citations and references for further research. I do wish, though, as I do nearly always now, that more online sources might have been cited. So much in imaging now is taking place online: being proposed, argued, defended, and actually implemented. So many of the commentators on such subjects—in France as well as elsewhere—personally and professionally conduct so much of their business on the Internet or the Minitel now that it really has become incumbent upon the authors of a printed work to include some references to online digitized resources on their subject. But perhaps this must await the book's online version. For now, in print and on paper, and with images or as images, the book is a fascinating and highly recommended resource.—Jack Kessler, kessler@well.sf.ca.us.