In the introduction to her book, The User's Directory of Computer Networks, Tracy LaQuey points out that this is not a book to be read from cover to cover, but rather one to be consulted and used as "a central reference guide." The User's Directory of Computer Networks is a directory and, therefore, is primarily useful for finding discrete pieces of information on networks and networking. However, a good deal of it can be read with interest and pleasure, especially by those with an historical interest in computer-mediated communication and computer networks. Sections of it should be read with care to facilitate its use as a directory and an information source.

The book was influenced by John Quarterman's book The Matrix and by his earlier article on networking distributed on the networks and published in Communications of the ACM in 1986. The LaQuey and Quarterman books are basic works for a reference section on computing, CMCS, and networks.

The Directory is itself based on earlier, annual publications and is an updated expansion of the 1989 guide published by the University of Texas at Austin. The earlier editions are still available online and can be consulted by those who wish to check the general outline and approach to the present edition. The address is EMX.UTEXAS.EDU; login anonymous. Use the NET.DIRECTORY for the introductory material and the NET.DIRECTORY/1988.NETBOOK for the several files of the text proper.

The Directory is organized in broad sections, each representing a major network system (i.e., BITNET, DECnet Internet, Internet, JANET, and USENET). There are also sections on UUCP, domains, the OSI/x.500 standards, electronic mail, and a list of organizations. The selection criteria were the size and scope of the network listed and, interestingly, the responsiveness of the network contact.

There is no index, but its lack is not as important as might be thought at first glance. The detailed "Contents" section outlines the major networks and lists the subnets associated with them. It is quite easy to find the particular one you're looking for. The "List of Organizations" section is useful both as a
list and as a finding aid.

The international scope of the Directory is very apparent here. It is a surprise to realize just how many institutions, both academic and commercial, are integral components of these networks and, one assumes, are using them as a standard part of their institutional life.

The "List of Organizations" is also a cross-referenced finding aid that can be used to locate the network associated with the institution you are interested in. Brief instructions on how to do this are mentioned in the "Introduction" and should be read first by anyone wanting to make full use of the directory. You are advised to look up your own organization in the "List of Organizations" and to trace its connectivity through the appropriate sections of the book. It's good advice, and it does reveal the practical design of the book and how useful it can be in real situations. The entries give a lot of information in very little space: a description of the equipment, network, and mail addresses; a contact person; and, useful when all else fails, a phone number. Finding a personal address is still not easy; you are left knowing the address of your correspondent, but still guessing at his or her ID. The solution to that problem will have to wait for a phone book to be published rather than a directory of sources. The Directory is not a phone book, but it does take you several steps along—the right-hand side of the address and the syntax are now apparent and the postmaster's ID is listed.

Much of the information for the Directory came from the information databases maintained at the individual Network Information Centres. The editor mentions an "accelerated editing process" which means that some of the detail was not checked or verified further. Readers are encouraged to send corrections to the NIC's for their network (the address is provided) and to send corrections, suggestions, or comments to the editor to be used in future editions of the book.

In imposing a uniform format on the entries and collecting the data in one large volume, the editor has created one place to look for detailed information and has created a very useful tool for e-mail and network enthusiasts. The consistent format adds considerably to the ease of use of the Directory.

LaQuey also stresses a concept called "Directory Services." That is, the creation of a resource guide that can be used for more than basic address information. The Directory has been designed to help the user to locate resources in the broader sense: contact names, database information, computer resources and the availability of OPAC's and catalogues. Explicit data in these areas is not provided, but the information given will allow the individual researcher to take the initial steps towards locating more information. Art St. George's work on OPAC's and the
various "Lists of Lists" for computer conferences on the networks will still be primary sources in this area. The LaQuey book expands their usefulness by detailing and explaining the framework within which they operate.

There is another dimension to the Directory that makes it interesting to read as well as informative. Short essays have been included to introduce each of the major sections. The one on BITNET is representative, with lots of technical information written in a non-technical, easy to read style. A brief, historical overview and a detailed geographic map showing the sites and the interconnecting store-and-forward routes gives a useful overview. A description of the general services provided, a list of network information materials and instructions on how to retrieve them, and an explanation of the commands and syntax for IBM and VAX users are useful. An extensive list of BITNET representatives is also included. This introduction is another area where an international dimension to networking is very apparent. EARN, NetNorth, and BITNET form one logical network and the degree of international cooperation that underlies that political fact is striking.

The section on the Internet follows the same pattern in combining history (and a glimpse at the future) with descriptions of technical processes providing a non-technical overview. The page on protocol suites gives an explanation of concepts, such as TCP/IP, and it provides a place to look it up when I, once again, forget the details.

These introductory essays are often written by experts—John Quarterman on electronic mail and Eugene Spafford on The USENET and UUCP, for example. Quarterman's article and his idea that electronic mail is the glue that holds networking systems together will be familiar to readers of The Matrix. The brief summary here is appropriate and the explanation of domains and gateways is helpful. One can only agree with the author the "the current mess [mail addressing conventions] is not ideal" and that "A generally accepted addressing syntax is the only real solution."

Eugene Spafford writes clearly on USENET and UUCP. Those of us who have absorbed BITNET and Internet procedures as the networking norm will find the idea of no central authority and no backbone structure a bit mystifying. The apparent anarchy of no (or very few) rules for members or participants does have a charm of its own. The processes are so complex and the scale is so vast, that the wonder is that the system works at all.

The User's Directory of Computer Networks is useful, of course, in the reference section of any library or academic department concerned with local, national, or international networking. It should also be useful for non-academic users. For example, managers of large, national bulletin board systems who
incorporate network mail and conferences into their services. Computer enthusiasts looking for help with the next step in their development of personal knowledge and skills will also find the Directory a great help.

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