

# Book Reviews

Margaret Rohdy, Editor

*The Intellectual Foundation of Information Organization.* By Elaine Svenonius. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Pr., 2000. 255p. \$37 (ISBN 0-262-19433-3) LC99-041301.

A common complaint of bus travelers in London is “You wait for ages for a bus, then two come along together!” Consciously or unwittingly, the library profession has been waiting for a long time for a good book on the overall topic of the organization of information. Now, two have come along within a year—the book under review and Arlene Taylor’s *The Organization of Information* (1999). It is, no doubt, due to the exigencies of the publishing process, but it is odd to find no mention of Taylor’s book in the text or extensive bibliography of the Svenonius book. Be that as it may, all interested in this topic should read both books and enjoy their complementary virtues.

This is a book of unremitting intellectuality. That is not to say that it is difficult to read—Svenonius writes clearly and well (though is somewhat given to using five-dollar words like “hypostatization” and “disambiguation”)—but the reader should understand that there are knotty and abstract issues being discussed here, and beach reading it ain’t!

Svenonius begins with a somewhat challenging first chapter that wrestles with a number of definitional and philosophical questions—including my all-time favorite, “What is information?” The book is, after all, on the topic of organizing that elusive concept—or is it? The author, failing to arrive at an entirely satisfactory def-

inition (as have many eminences before her), does make a clear distinction between “information” (however defined) and the embodiments of “information”—the latter being the true subjects of our attentions. When it comes down to it, in doing bibliographic control we have to have the idea of an incorporeal *Hamlet* in our minds, but what we describe, catalogue, and organize are the books, films, sound recordings, and so on, that are manifestations of the work and not the work itself. It is essential that the reader study and understand this first chapter as it lays out the assumptions on which the rest of the book is based. This should be true of any first chapter but, in this wicked world, often is not.

The first five chapters of the book are devoted to an analysis of the intellectual foundations of the organization of information. After the introductory chapter, Svenonius discusses the objectives of bibliographic systems (newspeak for “catalogs”) and traces their evolution from Panizzi through Cutter, Lubetzky, and the Paris Principles to IFLA’s *Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records* (FRBR) in 1998. She commends the latter for distinguishing between finding, collocating, choosing, acquiring, and navigating as fundamental purposes of catalogs, and then goes on to discuss how those objectives may be realized in “full-featured bibliographic systems.” The next chapter deals with the many types of bibliographic entities—documents, works, superworks, editions, and what the author calls “author sets” and “subject sets.” This is a most interesting and comprehensive

discussion, though, being of an amathematical mind, I cannot share the delight of others in statements such as “In set-theoretic notation, superwork may be defined as  $SW_i = \text{def } [x: x \text{ is derived from } a_{wi}]$ ” (38). Such formulae aside, this is as good an analysis of these complicated matters as I have seen. The last two chapters of the first part of the book are concerned with bibliographic languages (codes, standards, classification denotations, subject heading lists, etc.) by means of which we create bibliographic records, and the principles that underlie bibliographic descriptions.

The second half of the book builds on the carefully laid intellectual foundations of the first to look at the “languages” used to construct bibliographic records and systems. The author divides these into the languages relating to works (chapter 6), documents (chapter 7), and subjects (chapters 8–10). Beginning this discussion, the author rather confusingly writes, “Work languages describe information entities . . .” (87). This latter term is not defined and following, as it does, the detailed discussion of the notion of work in chapter 3, introduces an unwelcome vagueness. Though “work” is an abstract notion, it is one that is understood at least intuitively by those who study and practice cataloguing. To such, “*Hamlet* is a work” is both understandable and useful, hardly something one could say about “*Hamlet* is an information entity.” Leaving that aside, the discussion of vocabulary control, names (personal and corporate), titles (of works), the “main entry” question, and the many different relationships between works,

superworks, and editions is both clarifying and illuminating.

Chapter 7 deals with “document languages”—those formal denotations used to describe carriers of recorded knowledge and information. (It is a small point, but I prefer the logic of the organization of AACR2, which deals with the carriers before the works whose manifestations they embody, to the order of chapters here.) The author discusses what she calls physical (carrier), publication, and access attributes in detail but, again, at a somewhat abstract level, largely divorced from the framework and content standards (MARC, ISBD, etc.) that we use to contain and record those attributes.

The last three chapters deal with “subject languages”—alphabetic and classificatory. The former is sometimes referred to as “natural language” (as opposed to the artificial language of classifications), but this is erroneous because, though words from natural language are used, they are employed in a highly stylized and formal manner. In chapter 8, Svenonius demarcates these languages and discusses vocabulary selection and the semantics and syntax of alphabetic-subject languages. Chapter 9 takes all this into very deep waters with a discussion of relational and referential semantics in constructing alphabetic subject languages (subject headings to you and me). The last chapter deals with the topic of synthesis in subject languages and the application of techniques taken from classification theory. The book concludes with an afterword on the future of its topic, notes on the chapters, and a twenty-page bibliography.

This relatively short book (the text occupies 198 of its 255 pages) is worth the demands it makes on the reader and should be part of the library of anyone with a serious interest in bibliographic control.—*Michael Gorman* ([michaelg@csufresno.edu](mailto:michaelg@csufresno.edu)), *California State University, Fresno*

#### Work Cited

Taylor, Arlene G. 1999. *The Organization of Information*. Englewood, Colo.: Libraries Unlimited.

**Managing Electronic Serials: Essays Based on the ALCTS Electronic Serials Institutes, 1997–1999.** Ed. Pamela M. Bluh. ALCTS Papers on Library Technical Services & Collections, no. 9. Chicago: ALA, 2001. 189p. \$38 (ISBN 0-8389-3510-9) LC00-67646.

**Developing and Managing Electronic Journal Collections.** By Donnelly Curtis, Virginia M. Scheschy, and Adolfo R. Tarango. How-To-Do-It Manuals, no. 102. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000. 267p. \$55 (ISBN 1-55570-383-6) LC 00-55423.

**Selecting and Managing Electronic Resources.** By Vicki L. Gregory. How-To-Do-It Manuals, no. 101. New York: Neal-Schuman, 2000. 109p. \$55 (ISBN 1-55570-382-8) LC 00-41569.

**Successes and Failures of Digital Libraries.** Eds. Susan Harum and Michael Twidale. 35th Annual Clinic on Library Applications of Data Processing, 1998. Champaign, Ill.: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Univ. of Illinois, 2000. 134p. \$30 (ISBN 0-87845-107-2; ISSN 0069-4789).

**Collection Development in a Digital Environment.** Ed. Sul H. Lee. Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth, 1999. 118p. \$49.95 (ISBN 0-7890-0794-0) \$19.95 pbk. (ISBN 0-7890-0827-0) LC 99-39118.

**Electronic Collection Management.** Ed. Suzan D. McGinnis. Binghamton, N.Y.: Haworth, 2000. 159p. \$69.95 (ISBN 0-7890-1308-8) \$34.95 pbk. (ISBN 0-7890-1309-6) LC 00-53864.

**Collection Development in an Electronic Environment.** Ed. Thomas E. Nisonger. *Library*

*Trends* 48, no. 4 (spring 2000): 639–941. Champaign, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois, 2000. Single issue, \$18.50 (ISSN 0024-2594).

**Assessing Digital Library Services.** Ed. Thomas A. Peters. *Library Trends* 49, no. 2 (fall 2000): 221–390. Champaign, Ill.: Graduate School of Library and Information Science, Univ. of Illinois, 2000. Single issue, \$18.50 (ISSN 0024-2594).

As the literature about electronic resources proliferates, it is increasingly difficult to examine the large number of new publications to sort out those likely to be of greatest interest and use to *LRTS* readers. As a strategy for dealing with the increased number of publications in a new area of growing interest, the review editor requested a “megareview” covering not one, two, or three titles, but eight recent books with seemingly interchangeable titles, all on the subject of managing electronic resources in libraries.

Careful examination of these titles reveals that four are dual publications, issued simultaneously as monographs and as journal issues, two from Haworth Press and two from the Graduate School of Library and Information Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. One is a set of conference papers bearing both an ISBN and an ISSN. The other three are ordinary monographs, although one, from ALCTS, consists of a set of multiauthored papers that originated as a conference program and subsequently grew into several well-attended regional institutes before publication in book form.

In this review, in order to give each title a fair share of attention and space, first each is described briefly; next they are examined as an integrated body of literature; and finally, they are evaluated in the broader context of available literature on the subject.

*Managing Electronic Serials* includes eleven chapters by different