Recent Publications

BOOK REVIEWS

Beniger, James R. *The Control Revolution: Technological and Economic Origins of the Information Society.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Pr., 1986. 493p. $25 (ISBN 0-674-16985-9). LC 85-31743.

This book is structured around a theory describing the origins of what we loosely call *the information age* and explaining its significance in a broad context. The author makes a forceful statement about the deeper nature of information processing as an essential characteristic of life in general and of human evolution in particular. "Life itself implies purposive activity and hence control . . . in national economies no less than in individual organisms. Control, in turn, depends on information and activities involving information: information processing, programming, decision, and communication" (p.434).

Historically, the need for industrial control intensified as technology spurred the acceleration and greater complexity of human activity, eventually to the point at which speed and complexity exceeded human ability to cope adequately with them, both physically and mentally. That point was reached in the middle of the nineteenth century when the railroad industry created unprecedented potential for the rapid dissemination of people, products, and communication, thereby stimulating a host of technological advances in other areas of the economy. As technology ac-

celerated and complicated human activity, society required greater control. That requirement led to further innovation in technology, which again stimulated speed and complexity of activities, and so on, in what the author calls a *positively spiralling sequence* or what traditionally has been called a vicious cycle. Beniger advances the thought that "a society's ability to maintain control—at all levels from interpersonal to international relations—will be directly proportional to the development of its information technologies" (p.9). We have not just recently become an information society; we always have been one. We simply are in a new phase, accelerated at a higher level by microprocessing.

Beniger has organized a vast amount of evidence to support the theory and explanations advanced in his book, a book which at times could be mistaken for a thematic encyclopedia. It is stuffed with *firsts*, being largely a chronological survey of the major events in information-processing-as-control between 1840 and 1940. This focus on information from varied research perspectives sheds considerable light on the meaning of an information society. At the same time the author's carefully considered notion of a control revolution provides an enlightening framework through which to interpret and interrelate the major social, economic, and technological

changes of the past century. Beniger argues his control revolution theory convincingly. Specific parts of his relentless elaboration may be easily assailable, but overall he has given us a new way to view ourselves as a society and to consider our profession within it.—*Charles B. Osburn, University Libraries, University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa.*

Hyatt, James A., and Aurora A. Santiago. *University Libraries in Transition.* Washington, D. C.: National Assn. of College and Univ. Business Officers, 1987. 112p. $15 (ISBN 0-915164-29-9). LC 98-12819.

In Martin M. Cummings' *The Economics of Research Libraries* (Council on Library Resources, 1986), mention was made of a NACUBO-sponsored survey examining management practices of four university libraries undergoing rapid technological change, that is, in transition toward automation. The book under review is the official report of that survey.

The primary objectives of the study are:

1. to examine the management and planning of university libraries within the context of overall institutional goals and objectives; and

2. to examine the impact of technological changes on library operations, with regard to both current and future activities. The design and methodology of the project include the collection and analysis of background information on the participating institutions, site visits and interviews on a set of issues with key campus administrators and library officials, the documentation of the site visit findings, and concluding overview of the survey results.

It is, as the report rightly claims, "a landmark study, in that it not only provides a detailed analysis of library automation, but also describes institutional approaches to acquiring and maintaining automated systems." The four libraries, all members of the Association of Research Libraries, differ in governance and organizational structure but combined manifestly represent major characteristics of many American research libraries. Princeton and New York University li-

braries are private institutions, and Universities of Illinois and Georgia libraries are public state institutions. All four participate in national utilities: Princeton and NYU are members of RLIN, and Georgia and Illinois are members of OCLC. Both locally developed systems (Georgia's MARVEL, NYU's BOBCAT, Illinois' LCS/FBR) and externally purchased systems (GEAC and Carlyle) have been in use, and almost all aspects of library functions (circulation, reserve, acquisitions, serial control, online catalog) have been involved. The case studies offer the reader some fairly detailed analyses of four quite different approaches toward library automation, each responding to its specific needs and operating with its special strength and constraints. Princeton, with its tradition of participatory decision making and emphasis on scholarly research, developed its automation strategy by consensus-building among faculty, students, university administration, and library staff. Its experience with the 3M venture notwithstanding, or perhaps because of that, Princeton opted to purchase systems with proven viability instead of developing its own. The University of Illinois, with the strong support of the state and proactive role of the university librarian, assumed the leadership of a statewide automated library system that effectively links a number of academic libraries throughout Illinois and makes resource sharing a reality with an active and efficient statewide interlibrary delivery system. The New York University, described as a "federated institution," functions on many levels of informal contacts and overlapping relationships. The library itself has had a history of decentralized governance. Automation, which perforce propels toward some degree of centralization, provides the library an opportunity to play a central role in the technological transition of the university in its teaching and research programs. This the Bobst Library of NYU has in good measure proceeded to do. With the active personal involvement of the dean of the libraries and the pivotal role of library automation in the technological transformation of the university itself, NYU libraries have been