Book Reviews

Giesecke, Michael. *Der Buchdruck in der frühen Neuzeit: eine historische Fallstudie über die Durchsetzung neuer Informations- und Kommunikationstechnologien.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991. 994p. 68 DM (ISBN 3-518-58003-5).

This is a large book in every sense of the word. It combines a broad outline of the history and dissemination of printing technology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries with a comparative analysis of the intellectual and psychosocial consequences of that diffusion, focusing its argument on the similarities between that development and the rapid expansion of computerized communications in our own time. In it the reader sees the lines of a distinguished intellectual pedigree which includes some of the luminaries of modern German thinking on the nature of communication in society, notably Reinhart Koselleck, Paul Raabe, Niklas Luhmann, and Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht. Thirteen years in the writing, the book grew out of the author's *Habilitationsschrift*, and it demonstrates many of the strengths and weaknesses of that uniquely Teutonic academic genre: a systematic and exhaustive treatment of every conceivable nuance of the subject, a rigorous organizational sequencing of the arguments, a copious citation and documentation apparatus (over 230 pages of notes, indexes, and citations), and a dense, nearly impenetrable style which at times verges on the soporific.

Nevertheless, Michael Giesecke's arguments are significant and, for the most part, convincing. He reinterprets the book culture of the incunabula period in modern terms and with modern terminology as a complex system of information processing dependent upon the evolution of a vast array of specific new technologies, communication patterns, and modes of creating, imparting, and receiving knowl-edge. The printed book as a medium of social and political change has been a regular theme of book-historical scholarship virtually since the age of Gutenberg, but Giesecke goes much further than traditional analysts by insisting that it caused a fundamental change in the notion of what constituted information, and in the ways in which information could be processed. The advent of printing produced not merely economies of scale in production that led to broader dissemination of knowledge but also to a fundamentally different concept of the relationship between literacy and social progress. It caused the traditional structure of institutional censorship to disintegrate gradually over time by producing a volume and variety of material which exceeded the ability of the old censorship apparatus to survey, and by requiring the creation of a vast and complex system of distribution for the organization and supply of markets. In education, it led to the reorganization of curricula and teaching methodologies at all levels, the restructuring of old disciplines, and the establishment of countless new ones. It permitted the production of "Literature" to evolve from the leisurely pursuit of gentlemen to a widely accessible profession having the potential to generate enough revenue to live comfortably, with a concomitant eradication of the barriers of class and caste (with all the attendant implications for a broadened intellectual horizon). In all these areas, and in many, many more instances, the author documents his view that the arrival of book technology swept away the chief ideological underpinnings of medieval and classical thought and paved the way for the rise of modern social, economic, and political structures in Europe.

One of the most interesting aspects of Giesecke's modern functional analysis is

his attempt to use the early history of the book as a paradigm for the continuing emergence of present-day electronic communications technologies. His notion of the importance of the free market in the development of late medieval information dissemination carries with it the echoes of similar debates on the desirability of commercially viable networks as opposed to publicly supported ones outside the market structure. The question of competition between the old scriptographical tradition and the new typographical science is likewise reflected in the current struggle between the proponents of the paperless society and those whose ideas of scholarship and culture are inextricably bound to the printed book as artifact.

This volume is an original and valuable addition to the literature of the book's history, but the force of its argument is somewhat diluted by its sheer size and the degree of detail to which it resorts to buttress its premises. A more general statement of its principal theses, with a less elaborately documented defense of them, would probably be a desirable middle ground for most potential readers; in its present form it demands an intense and prolonged concentration which is perhaps more appropriate to the narrowest technical specializations than to more broadly conceived humanistic views of the history of the book.—*James Henry Spohrer, University of California, Berkeley.*

Cataloging Heresy: Challenging the Standard Bibliographic Product. Proceedings of the Congress for Librarians, February 18, 1991, St. John's University, Jamaica, New York, with additional contributed papers. Ed. Bella Hass Weinberg. Medford, N.J.: Learned Information, 1992. 217p. $30 (ISBN 0-938734-60-1). LC 92-9374.

Although the title *Cataloging Heresy* might suggest that this book proposes radically different ways of looking at cataloging and bibliographic control, it is instead a rather useful overview of some of the problems with uniform titles, subject headings, classification, and the description of special types of library materials.

Editor Bella Hass Weinberg has compiled a well-edited volume of papers from the 1991 Congress for Librarians at St. John's University. It provides a framework for library school students and practitioners to think critically about cataloging data in standard bibliographic records. Managers who look for the most expeditious, most economical method to process library materials are warned of the conflicts and inaccuracies inherent in shared records. The papers examine what data should be included in these shared bibliographic records and how those data might be altered in response to a given collection, special type of material, or special user group.

Part 1 consists of edited papers from ten invited speakers as well as introductory and concluding remarks. The seven contributed articles in Part 2 remind us that for some types of materials (special collections of literature and music, musical sound recordings, nonprint materials, digital cartographic databases), standard practices may not be adequate.

The Library of Congress is attacked, as usual, for not keeping up with current, politically correct terminology in its Library of Congress Subject Headings and for its practice of assigning insufficient and inadequate headings and subdivisions (articles by Sanford Berman and Hope Olson). Fortunately, alternatives and positive recommendations for future direction are provided. The reader is also reminded of the increased efforts on the part of the Library of Congress, as the national bibliographic agency, to inform and consult widely on changes to cataloging policy in order to reflect consensus within the library community (article by John Byrum).

Apart from criticisms of Library of Congress Subject Headings, there are the expected papers on the shortcomings of Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules, Library of Congress Rule Interpretations, and Library of Congress classification. Other papers provide wonder-ful historical background for library school students and those in the profession who may have forgotten about the National Library of Medicine classification (Sally Sinn),