
Book Reviews

Nancy C. MULVANY: **Indexing Books**. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago, IL 1994. 320 p., ISBN 0-226-55014-1 (cloth).

This book deals with the indexing of books, but it also throws bridges to other indexing variants by discussing fundamental principles of indexing of every type as well as the peculiarities of the indexing of multi-authored and multi-volume works and of multi-indexer indexing, including the manner of working of entire indexing teams, needed e.g. when many journal articles must be stored in data banks. Already the very first chapter with its parts "What is an index and what is it not?", "The purpose of an index", "The audience: Who uses indexes?" and "How are indexes used?" deals with basic questions that need to be clarified in any type of indexing. Thus the book outlines an overall perspective of the vast field of indexing generally and it illustrates just how book indexing work is to be methodically classified alongside the other indexing variants.

The book not only reflects the great practical experience of the authoress but also the experience of other experts who contributed as good colleagues to bringing it into being. The result - to state this right away - is a work which is exemplary in the clarity of its structuring, in its completeness and in the persuasive power of its presentation.

The sometimes delicate communication with the author, the publisher and the user has been presented with precision, starting from the indexer's concern for adequate knowledge of the subject matter on his own part, down to the details of the negotiation of the contract with the publisher.

The selection and wording of the various index entries, their arrangement and the presentation of their mutual relationships as well as the various possible variants of the final layout are discussed in great detail.

A special chapter is devoted to the "Tools for Indexing", especially the possibilities and limitations of computer-assisted indexing. Embedded and dedicated indexing software are described in detail. Also, a clear limit is drawn between the tasks of the indexer on the one hand and the meaningful tasks of a program on the other hand.

In a wholesome way the book destroys any hope of ever succeeding in attaining through algorithmic means that quality of an index which must be demanded and which an experienced indexer can attain without difficulty. As can be read between the lines, the reason for this is that in indexing we are dealing with a typically indeterminate process which by its very nature defies any satisfactory algorithmization. Deserving of literal quotation are the statements: "All tools are only an adjunct to the intellectual task of indexing" and "There is no tool that thinks for us". Such a conclusion is convincing to anyone who has attentively read the preceding parts of the book and has become

convinced that good indexing is not only a craft, but also an art and that it demands a creativity of its own. This applies to the selection of what is to be indexed and to the shaping of the relational network. The indexer must give proof of his talent also in the linguistic formulation of the entries. Most of what must be formulated in the drafting of an index is not contained in those terms in the text of the authors.

In the chapter "The Future" it is shown, in a realistic fashion dispensing with any utopias, in what respect the present-day tools are still in need of improvement. Quite properly it is particularly in the increased use of thesauri that progress in the future is perceived, since by this means the relational structure of the index can be built up more transparently and logically.

Reading this book is a necessary and even almost sufficient exercise for anyone wishing to acquire knowledge in indexing, to refresh his knowledge or, with the aid of the exemplary index, to read up on specific questions.

In addition, and for reasons given in the above, this book should be recommended to anyone who has set himself or herself the task of devising an autonomously working indexing program or who even claims to be already able to supply such a program.

The book might also be recommended, as required reading, to the publishers, so that they, too, may become more aware of the high intellectual rank of indexing. Then the indexer would not so frequently be forced to keep the quality of his index at a low level or even to reduce it again in order to comply with overly petty demands concerning the scope of the index (space) or the time expended for indexing. Also, the publisher would then less frequently, for reasons of production cost reduction, content himself with amateurishly produced indexes, erroneously believing that indexing is as simple as breathing (as the authoress most aptly criticizes) and that the indexing of a book may safely be left to any inexperienced author.

Together with the vivid style of the authoress, the great variety of practice-oriented examples contributes to making one reluctant to put the book away before having completely finished it.

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S.R. Ranganathan 1892-1972. Edited by Edward Dudley; introduction by M.P. Satija. New Delhi: Ess Ess Publ. 1992. (First published London: Library Association, 1974) 39pp. Cloth ISBN 81-7000 1390 (available from Dr. M.P. Satija, RF/4, GND University, Amritsar-143005, India)

This first Indian reprint may fill a gap in any library's or student's collection of library history. It consists of six short papers by eminent British librarians and classification experts, who were also friends, colleagues and followers of Ranganathan. The papers were presented at a memo-