

Book Reviews

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EDWARDS, J.A.; KINGSCOTT, A.G. (Eds.): **Language Industries Atlas**. Second Edition. Amsterdam/Berlin/Oxford/Tokyo/Washington, DC: IOS Press. 1997. V, 440p., ISBN 90-5199-252-1.

This is both a directory and a lexicon, as it alphabetically lists organizations, institutions, newspapers, etc., (mainly in Europe), as well as subject entries such as 'Linguistics', 'Lesser-used languages', and 'Lexicography'. It includes names of languages, along with abbreviations and acronyms, with descriptions of the meaning of these terms. For example, *Language Industries* has the following explanation (p.262): "This term first appeared in French ('les industries de la langue') in the early 1980s and its significance appears to have been steadily extended since. At one time it was associated with those companies involved in what we now call 'language engineering' but it is now taken to apply to all commercial, professional and organisational activities". There are also references to entries of institutions, mainly from Belgium and Canada.

Why was the publication called an "Atlas"? There is no explanation in this second edition; perhaps there was one in the first. Usually an 'atlas' is a geographic work of maps; the term has also been used to name a work of tables. However, in this case there are no tables whatsoever. The only reference to geography consists in the fact that the index to all the entries in alphabetical order is according to countries, altogether 38, mainly European ones, but also some from other regions, such as America and Australia.

In the main alphabetical section, the entries of institutions contain in some cases only the name and address of an institution and the name of a contact person. In other cases there is a short or a longer description of the aims of an institution, as well as a reference to further entries of interest (p.43-413).

In the Introduction it is stated that the first edition was produced by Paul Hearn and Diane Button of Ink-Belgium NV in 1994. The second edition has been produced by the compilers named above and published by Praetorius Ltd., a UK language consultancy company for DG XIII of the European Commission. It is also stated that the *Language Industries Atlas* is not a guide to products and systems of lan-

guage engineering, as this information is available in the *Language Engineering Directory*, also published with the assistance of DG XIII of the European Commission. The entries have been completely revised from the first edition, following a fresh survey by questionnaire, facsimile and telephone.

After the introduction the work starts with a description of the organization of the Atlas, a list of abbreviations for 96 languages (using international standard two-letter abbreviations), and an overview of the Language Industries, which is an extended rationale of a number of application areas of language, such as language for special purposes, terminology, technical writing, language for business, computer-assisted language learning, translation and interpreting, language mediation, machine translation, computational linguistics, natural language processing, and speech processing (p.12-22).

In addition, the 11 official languages of the European Union are listed along with the 23 "Other languages", such as Basque, Catalan, Frisian, Latin, Romanian, Scots, and Welsh. And a last section describes the language situation in 55 countries of Europe, in a few cases also with indication of the number of people speaking a certain language. Here is the text given under the entry of *Andorra* (Principality of Andorra): "The official language of this small principality is Catalan, but as more than three quarters of the population of 65,000 are not native Andorrans, Castilian Spanish and French are also spoken." (p.25)

Among the entries of the general alphabet we found also the Internationale Gesellschaft für Wissensorganisation e.V. (ISKO) / (International Society for Knowledge Organization) with its Frankfurt address (now to be updated) and its purposes and publications. Although the index lists the entries by countries and thus includes ISKO under Germany, it cannot also be found under 'International Organizations' such as the FID. It is hoped that this and a few similar cases will be considered in the third edition. Also it seems somewhat strange that there is an entry for 'Artificial Intelligence' but none for 'Artificial Languages', as it would have been worthwhile to inform somewhere about the artificial languages in use. There is, though, an entry on 'Esperanto', identified as an

artificial language and with references to the Universal Esperanto Association and to the World Esperanto Congress, but its broader concept and any other artificial languages have obviously been forgotten.

Nevertheless, this second edition of the *Language Industries Atlas* is certainly a useful, worthwhile and handy reference work for all parties concerned, and it also looks fine with its glossy, light violet hard cover.

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CAPURRO, Rafael: **Leben im Informationszeitalter.** (Living in the Age of Information). Berlin: Akad.-Verl. 1995. 131p, ISBN 3-05-002716-9.

Such a complex, imaginative and detailed collection of essays as Capurro's *Leben im Informationszeitalter* can hardly be summarized in a few mere words. At the price of considerably reducing its complexity, the following key thoughts, however, may be emphasized. Our contemporary information and media society suffers from a one-sided functionalistic and technocratic orientation, paying undue homage to the cognitive paradigm and disconnecting man from the *Lebenswelt* (Edmund Husserl's concept of the world in which we live) finally ending in man's degradation. Referring to both Martin Heidegger and Greek philosophy, Capurro even speaks of Man's desacralization, of his loss of plenitude and being.

The preeminence of technology, rapidity, simulation and the virtual, as well as the danger of information overload, should be opposed by the traditional art of living and the practices of the formation of the self (p.22-36): asceticism, meditation, contemplation, writing, dialogue. Capurro demands that the dimensions of the *Lebenswelt* be reconquered in order to enrich the pragmatism of information technology. He recommends a new asceticism of life, of the use of the media and information and demands the conscious self-confined employment of weak [sic] rather than strong information technologies. Capurro pleads for an understanding of the contingency, fragility and mortality of human life, a turning away from an instrumental anthropocentrism, a reconsideration of the great tales and myths and a revival of the praising functions of language. Fortunately, Capurro voices all these recommendations without encouraging a new esotericism or even irrationalism.

True to these premises, Capurro defines informatics or computer science as a hermeneutic, highly philosophical discipline rather than as merely technological. Computer science is asked to become more

than just a science of electronic tools and to attach importance to its ethical dimension¹, above all to the virtue of *prudentia*. The artificial and postbiological higher intelligences of the computer scientist's dreams are unmasked as a "mythology of ghosts in technical attire" (p.78-96), as metaphysical machinery which, by a bold analogy, Capurro compares to angels as they are imagined in Thomistic angelology. The criteria of this comparison are substantiality, knowledge and will.

Certain remarkable assets of Capurro's book should be emphasized: the refusal of a mere technological reductionism; the emphasis on the ethical dimension of the information society; the concern with the ecological perspectives of information; the visionary power of integrative and holistic thought; the reliability, competence and intellectual precision of argumentation; the epistemological radicalism; the intimate knowledge of the major concepts of the history of philosophy which should not be forgotten in an age of restlessness (*gnothi sauton*: "Know Thyself"); the endeavor to use information theory in order to open up new paths of anthropology; the insight into the ambivalence and paradox of the *conditio humana*; the fundamental criticism of the amorality and cynicism of our contemporary society.

The drawbacks of Capurro's collection are palpable, too:

1. The ways out of the crisis suggested by the author are rather noncommittal. The appeal to the reader to enforce the value of virtues such as justice, courage and prudence is rather vague.
2. History teaches the sad experience that Capurro's practices of the self are at the disposal of an intellectual elite, the happy few only.
3. Capurro's somewhat unrestrained joy in analogy, metaphor and expressive imagery generates far-fetched comparisons and almost 'promiscuous' equations; concepts are hereby removed from their definitive historical context and made homeless. Just one example: Capurro enthusiastically describes the "Platonic cave of the world-wide web" as a "rather adequate image of our information society" (p.107). Such an image smacks of a tempting aestheticism. But is it incisive enough to be of real help?
4. The attempt to attach catchy labels to threatening phenomena of crisis (e.g., "GOLEM-galaxy", p.112) is rather problematic, too.
5. In my opinion it is somewhat naive to believe that "paradoxically mass media may become media of the formation of the self" (p.43).
6. Capurro's affection for hyphens serving the etymologizing marking of words – a stylistic device notoriously characteristic of Heidegger – some-