Op-Ed-Opinions and Editorials-3 Takes on the Future of the Book

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Recommended Citation
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.2099
3 Takes on the Future of the Book...

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Several publications were issued in recent months that assessed and predicted what is happening with the book, the monograph, the scholarly item libraries acquire and retain anticipating what kind of readership will be attracted to it and hope that it will sustain generations of readers to come. These publications all had different takes on what is happening and why so many changes in the publishing industry are forcing such a significant discussion on the future of the book. We all know and recognize too well that the high prices of serials and new technologies have forced libraries to seriously re-vue all their acquisitions very carefully in order to accommodate the wide variety of materials necessary to support their instruction and research collections for the short and long term. Different strategies were employed to stretch finances for the greatest buying power; many libraries conducted major serial cancellation projects; consortia were formed to better share resources; and fewer books were bought. Libraries continue to participate in organized interlibrary borrowing and lending programs with partners and the worldwide community identified through the bibliographic utilities of which they are members. We also entertain how changes in academic dictate to some degree publishing trends among the scholarly community. The publish or perish syndrome, however vital its practice, is being examined and the academic enterprise is gradually changing how faculty members are reviewed. Many institutions are reviewing their academic programs as well, and new degree and research programs replace existing ones and the information needs of the campus change. The increase in collaboration among academic colleagues and the emergence of new and specialized multidisciplines introduces and forces new publishing markets.

Geoffrey Nunberg edited The Future of the Book (University of California Press, 1996) with papers presented at a conference held in Summer 1994 and his own chapter in that volume, "Farewell to the Information Age.⁴⁴ discusses the challenges of electronic publishing. He writes, "For the present it's enough to observe that there is nothing in the economics of publishing as a whole or the body of practice surrounding the use of the printed book that militates for its disappearance, even over the long term. And while it is certain that many forms and genres will migrate in part or in whole to an electronic mode of existence over the coming years, there are numerous other printed genres that stand to benefit from the new technologies, whether in the form of electronic text preparation, demand printing, Web advertising, or what may be most important, the computerized inventory systems that have made possible new types of retail distribution that have vastly extended general public access to texts over the past five years in ways that are arguably more significant than the effects of electronic media. There will be a digital revolution, but the printed book will remain an important participant in it." (p. 104). The remainder of this chapter addresses the philology of information, the phenomenology of information, the properties of information, the future of information, information on the Web, and after information. We are reminded how critical the Web has become for exchange of information, commerce, communication and publishing.

Other chapters in this volume are equally provocative and interesting reading. Many contributors are well known academics and writers spanning different disciplines and who have been active in discussions about electronic publishing and scholarly communication. This conference for which the papers were prepared took place in Italy emphasizing the concept of a global electronic community where there was lots of interaction among participants. The international threads here are excellent because each and every issue is a global one and the implications about the future of the book strike scholars everywhere. Familiar scholars with chapters in this book include Carl Hess, Reggae Derby, Patrick Basin, George Landau, James O'Donnell, Michael Joyce, Umberto Eco and others. Each wonders in what context hypertext will be the language of the future. The issues are endless and the ideas gleaned from reading this volume encourage lots of discourse for all interested parties.

Daedalus devoted their Fall 1996 (volume #125, #4) issue to Books, Bricks and Bytes and 19 articles celebrate the centennial of the New York Public Library. Not only is the library the central focus of this issue, but there contains good background on how technology has changed the library from a print only environment to a very sophisticated electronic experience. The preface states, "It is not at all surprising that the digital library, with all that it portends for the future of the book and the periodical, but also with all that it implies for the kinds of information that will be collected, for the problems of copyright, access and costs that will necessarily preoccupy those responsible for the libraries of the 21st century, should figure conspicuously in this Daedalus issue." (p. v).

The papers were contributed by movers and shakers in the library profession and reflect the full spectrum of library environments from the Library of Congress, public libraries, academic, research and national libraries abroad, in Britain, South Africa, France, Russia, Germany, and emphasize the relationships that librarians and readers have with the changing contents of libraries and how they are used. Peter Lyman opens the volume by exploring what is a digital library and it is almost like correspondents offer insight into the clariy of related issues with many practical examples. Chapters by James Billington, the Librarian of Congress describe what the LC will be like when it celebrates its 200th anniversary in 2000 and how online its holdings will be; Ann Okerson who tackles the option of buying or leasing information and introduces the range of licenses available from different publishing outfits for different types of access; Peter Young challenges readers to think broadly about what the profession of librarianship currently includes and what the new technologies offer for enhanced communication, interaction of large numbers of people and stimulating the political process. He describes as "postmodern librarianship." Readers who currently participate in this dynamic era of great change in libraries, are likely to be bored with this volume, but the broader community of readers will find it to con.

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Money Talks
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liaisons to the various departments. The next step is to convey the results with the department representatives and faculty. We will be sending a letter to the appropriate administrators describing the need for additional funds for selected new journals and the relatively small increase in allocation to the Library this would entail. The results of the survey allow us to better demonstrate the extent of the need for additional journals that would be used.

Longer-range plans include using the survey information (along with other data) to formulate a more formal policy for periodical collection development. We expect to expand the survey to other groups. We have already given the survey to new faculty starting September 1996 and approximately a quarter have responded to date. We would also like to survey graduate students. We also plan to ask faculty to update their list of "read" journals on a regular basis; part of this activity will involve trying to determine a method that is easy and does not consume much time, both on the part of the faculty member completing it and on our part in tabulating the results and updating the database.

Along with the usage data we collected from the survey we would like to integrate data on pricing, holdings, format, citation analyses, indexing, circulation, and so on in a database that can be manipulated in any number of ways to help provide information to make informed choices about subscriptions, document delivery or other means of access. This would help us achieve one of our original (and loftiest) goals: the creation of what we like to call "the world's largest serials management database." We hope we can complete this before the year 3000.

NB: This paper was adapted from a paper presented at the 1996 Charleston Conference.