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> '*Librarianship has become preoccupied, perhaps to a point of obsession, with its own future. There seems to be a growing sense that change is now moving at such a rate that steering may have ceased to be an option'* (Ross Atkinson, 2001)

There has been discussion about possible future scenarios for libraries and information services, and for new roles for librarians and information specialists, for much longer than one might think. Certainly, these thoughts far pre-date the rise of the internet, which is commonly supposed to be fountainhead of librarian angst. As long ago as 1894, speculative articles suggested that the printing of books was about to be replaced by the new technology of the wax cylinder, and libraries would shortly become 'phonographoteks' (Uzanne 1894), and have continued unabated ever since (Sapp 2002). The advent of the digital computer led to a renewed interest in predicting library futures, a classic example example being that of Licklider (1965). The advent of the PC and the Internet merely increased the flow of inventive future scenarios, albeit mutually contradictory and some rapidly outmoded (see, for example Schuman 1989, 1997). The prospect, followed by the reality, of e–journals and e-books, and of cloud computing, together with the rise of repositories, and other sources of open access scholarly materials, have further raised questions as to the future nature and viability of libraries.

This obsession, if such it is, has received support from the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee, which promotes good use of information technologies in higher education and academic research. JISC is promoting a 'libraries of the future' initiative, involving face-to-face events, printed resources, blogs, podcasts, and so on:
http://www.jisc.ac.uk/librariesofthefuture

This is based around two questions which we may regard by now as rather 'traditional', as they seem to have been asked on man occasions:
- in an information world in which Google apparently offers us everything, what place is there for the traditional, and even the digital, library ?
- in a library environment which is increasingly moving to the delivery of online rather than print resources, what of the academic library's traditional place at the heart of campus life ?

While JISC accentuates the positive, declaring on their initiative home page that 'one thing is sure – libraries will continue to be essential to academic success and the future of education and research', others are less sure. Peter Murray-Rust, a leader in molecular informatics, wrote in his blog, quoted on the JISC initiative's forums, that "I'm left with the overwhelming impression that the [library] community is now past caring about the future of the library".

Perhaps the problem is that the demise of libraries has been predicted for so long, that those directly affected feel either punch-drunk or cynical. Perhaps the drawing down of library documents from the cloud, in the way in which music and videos are now drawn by systems such as Spotify, is simply the newer instantiation of the phongraphotek; a theoretical and technical possibility which will never come to pass, because it is neither needed nor wanted. Perhaps.

It seems unlikely to me that we will ever wish to dispense with the organised and managed collections of documents, provided in a dedicated space (physical and/or virtual), and associated with useful services, which are the centrality of anything that might be termed a 'library'. If these are dispensed with, in any contexts, then there will be even more need for the pretentiously titled but genuinely valuable 'knowledge navigator' role, touted for some years.

And all of this, of course, is documentation. And this journal will be here to record its development as a subject and discipline.

David Bawden

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