Introduction

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Ultimately, libraries are responsible for gathering, selecting, organizing, disseminating, and preserving recorded knowledge and information in all forms and for providing assistance and instruction in their use. Is technology, as some allege, going to make some of these tasks unnecessary and others solely the result of interaction between individuals and machines? In short, will electronic technology supplant all other means of communication of words, images, and symbols, and will libraries and librarians reside only in the faded memories of the old?

The first step in approaching these questions is to appraise our current reality. One aspect of that reality is that, collectively, libraries contain hundreds of millions of nondigital carriers of recorded information, and only a minute fraction of that recorded knowledge and information is available in digital form or will be made available in digital form (to understand the latter point, just consider the relatively tiny scale and immense costs of today's digitizing projects). Those enamored of technology have come to call this vast well-organized global resource of the records of humankind "legacy collections." The term is intended to be dismissive, but human beings turn their backs on, and close their minds to, their intellectual and cultural legacy at their peril. There was a reason that the epoch in which learning was lost was called the Dark Ages.

"Books," said Barbara Tuchman, "are the carriers of civilization. Without books, history is silent, literature dumb, science crippled, thought and speculation at a standstill" (in Maggio, 1992, p. 34). Societies entrust their books and other tangible documents that record human civilization
to libraries. Those who care for the contents of libraries know that they
are under our jurisdiction only temporarily and that we must pass them
on intact. We are not the owners of library collections but merely their
trusted custodians, adding to them the record of our own time, facts so
obvious as to be often overlooked or forgotten. In fact, to be responsible
for a library or part of a library at any level is a weighty matter because it is
a responsibility to the past and to the future and not merely to the people
who walk through library doors this week, this month, or this year.

When the hero of George R. Stewart’s (1974) novel *Earth Abides* en-
ters his university’s library after most of the human race has been de-
stroyed by a plague, he is suddenly overcome by a strange new sense of awe:

Here rested in storage the wisdom by which civilization had been
built, and could be rebuilt. Now that he knew himself soon to be a
father, he had suddenly a new attitude for the future. The child
should not grow up to be a parasite, scavenging forever. And it would
not need to. Everything was here. All the knowledge! . . . After
looking into the main reading-room and then wandering through
two levels of the stacks, he became so excited that he left the build-
ing in a frenzy of imagination. . . . He drove home in a kind of trance.
Books! Most of the knowledge was in books, and yet he soon saw that
they were not all. First of all, there must be people who could read,
who knew how to use the books. (p. 132)

Today the wonderful resources in libraries are being endangered by
technology. When we tamper with access to the records of the past in
such a way as to change them or make them less accessible, and when we
digitize and discard the originals, whatever we may tell ourselves we are
doing and whatever our reasons for doing it, we betray the trust which we
assumed when we accepted responsibility for them. When we do not an-
swer questions about sources with the full range of possibilities, but in-
stead suggest only a search of the Internet, we abdicate our central role as
intermediaries between the records and the users. When those of us who
are school or college librarians forget the essential links between the li-
brary and the education of students, between the curriculum and their
minds and futures, when we substitute training in the use of electronic
sources for help with analytical skills to find and evaluate ideas, we are
betraying our students and betraying society.

Libraries contain the records of human life and human lives. When
we open a book, we open someone else’s life and someone else’s thought.
Technology in libraries may help us to retrieve those records of life and
thought, but the truly human lies in the appreciation of them, the under-
standing of them which allows us to use them to create further lights of
understanding.

People who purchase and implement library technology often make
changes without asking if they provide better service or improve access
for library users. They tend to lose sight of the basic fact that people and
their real needs are at all times more important than are the artificial methods, including technological methods, that we devise for organizing information.

In early history, there was the earth in space and the people on the earth. We began to measure time by rotations of the earth around the sun (although we thought it was the reverse) and thus created time. Then, although we had created time, we began to obey it and to regulate our lives by it. We also began to record our lives and thoughts in words and images—the age of miracles had begun.

When individuals had a surplus beyond the food and crafts we needed to survive, we created trade and to assist trade we created money. Though we had created money, we began to regulate our lives by the quest to acquire it. The invention of writing took humankind to higher levels; materialism drags us down from those levels. Thus was born the tension that exists to this day—a tension that technology can both exacerbate and allay. The choice is ours.

To save time and make more money, we created machines, the most recent and far-reaching of which is the computer and the implications of the use of computers. Though we created computer technology, we have begun to be ruled by it and to regulate our lives by it.

Throughout human history, there have been rare people who have discovered previously unknown truths of the physical world and of the human mind and spirit, thoughtful people who recorded their thoughts, who created art, music, and literature.

What they left behind was of great human value. These records of civilization were placed in libraries, archives, and museums for safekeeping. Many people—librarians and archivists—now devote their lives to caring for the records, making them accessible, and adding to them. Others—teachers—devote their lives to interpreting the contents of the records to students of all ages to ensure civilization's survival.

That culture of accumulation, preservation, and dissemination of knowledge is inimical to the money culture and to the wrong uses of technology. There are those who do not value the culture of knowledge and use money and technology to feed self-importance and feelings of power. Those who feel insufficiently powerful can come to see technology in terms of personal aggrandizement, to want control over it in order to control others; they may consider anything new to be desirable because it is new and not because it is useful. Some observers go so far as to suggest that the consequent elevation of technology has created a new religion with the machine as god (Noble, 1997, especially his appendix "A Masculine Millennium: A Note on Technology and Gender" which is particularly appropriate in that the majority of American librarians are female).

Some educational administrators tell teachers that education is a business, students are products, and students can learn from computers as
well or better than when they are taught by expensive human beings. Librarians who value technology above the collections they administer, and who find their staffs less docile than machines, want more machines and fewer people. Librarians are being told, “You are now much more important than the public, who don’t understand computers,” and “You are ahead of the teachers because you understand library technology.” If the librarians think at such times, “But we are here to serve the public, not to be more important,” or “We are here to help the teachers, not to be ahead of them,” they often do so without expressing those thoughts.

Education technocrats give computers to the teachers and say, “they will help you teach” but what they mean is “computers will teach in your place and I’ll have money to buy even more technology.” Library technocrats say to librarians and staff, “Computers will help with your jobs” but what they mean is “Technology will eventually replace as many of you as possible (but not me) and I’ll have more money to spend on technology.”

It sometimes seems as though library economy is now concerned exclusively with hardware and software, which are everywhere in libraries and must be tended by expensive specialists, many of whom understand the intricacies of the machines but little else. To those who promote technology for its own sake, any change in the status quo is seen as progress, and persons who object to, or are unenthusiastic about, negative change are called obstructionists or Luddites.

In short, there is a continuing need to examine frequently how technology in libraries is affecting human beings, how it affects the surviving work of persons now gone who contributed to the record of civilization, and how it affects persons now living who are the record’s caretakers. With that end in mind, the editors have here assembled a collection of eleven articles expressing a variety of views of the human response to library technology.

This issue builds on a similar issue of Library Trends published a decade ago, in spring 1989; it also includes two articles that revisit themes of 1989, and it includes under the title “Ten Years Later” short updating comments by the authors of three other articles that appeared in the 1989 issue. It is not Library Trends’ policy to use reprints, but we sought permission for an exception to that policy in order to include a relevant and important article that first appeared in American Scholar. Because of the close connection of this article to the theme of this issue, we have been allowed to use it as the lead selection “Revolution in the Library” by Gertrude Himmelfarb, for which we express our appreciation to Himmelfarb, to American Scholar, and to Library Trends Editor F. W. Lancaster.

Lancaster also asked that we seek articles that examine the responses of higher education faculty to library technology. This charge is fulfilled by two articles, one by Virginia Massey-Burzio and one by Wendy
Starkweather and Camille Wallin, which are based on research involving teaching faculty at major universities on opposite sides of the United States, with interesting results.

Suzanne Hildenbrand identifies a growing schism in library education resulting from technology which may be seriously dividing the profession itself: two types of degrees are separating library school students by gender, a movement with possibly far-reaching implications.

Karin Borei, stressing the value of technology and the importance of its positive role of improving human communication, writes about her personal experience with two electronic lists, one of which she manages.

Linda Dobb analyzes her experience with management and staff retreats to plan for and respond to change, finding that her staff has moved from a view of the library as technology-driven to a library reaffirming human and service values.

Dorothy Jones follows her 1989 survey of the attitudes to technology of support staff with a new study which again finds positive responses, but increasing reservations about training, stress, merit recognition, and fewer staff doing more work.

Yin Zhang, a doctoral candidate, studies the use of Internet-based sources for scholarly research, noting reluctance to use them because of poor quality or their tendency to mutate or disappear; she includes ways to improve use of electronic sources.

Laverna Saunders examines the virtual library concept, and the human role within it, coming to the conclusion that librarians will be needed more than ever to help users with changing technologies and to humanize the virtual setting.

Donald Riggs and Sha Li Zhang trace the pattern of technology's influence on library science journals; as technology content grows year by year, journal articles may affect librarian and staff expectations about their work life and learning needs.

Finally, to remind us again of the priceless heritage from the past which is the *raison d'etre* of libraries and archives, David Zeidberg offers an archival view of technology and a look at the challenges of the future.

**CONCLUSION**

Almost thirty years ago, a commentator on Madison Avenue media images said, "America's technology has turned in upon itself; its corporate form makes it the servant of profits, not the servant of human needs" (Embree, 1970, p. 189). This is true today of many applications of library technology; libraries are or should be dedicated to serving human needs, not to serving profit or any other motive.

Most people come to the library to get a good book, yet their needs are often threatened by the dominance that technology is assuming in
libraries. Under the heading "Why do we ignore the 80 percent of patrons who want books to come first?" Francine Fialkoff (1997) editorialized in Library Journal: "Books are central to what libraries provide . . . They entertain and enlighten, inspire and instruct. We can’t afford to ignore them" (p. 48). Most people go to library schools (whatever name those schools bear) to become librarians but, increasingly, their education does not equip them to do what they want to do.

Because the mission of libraries is to "collect, preserve, organize and disseminate . . . the records of humankind and to provide human services based on those records" (Crawford & Gorman, 1995, p. 183), we must regard with some skepticism the lemming-like rush to technology-at-all-costs and avoid confusing the means to an end with the end itself.

“When we don’t protect our treasures, the loss echoes for ages,” says Clifford Stoll (1995) of the lost library of ancient Alexandria, but he adds of the contemporary scene, “No, I don’t worry about the bookless library . . . . Instead I suspect computers will deviously chew away at libraries from the inside. They’ll eat up book budgets and require librarians that are more comfortable with computers than with children and scholars. Libraries will become adept at supplying the public with fast, low-quality information. The result won’t be a library without books—it’ll be a library without value” (p. 216).

To avoid this frightening and all too plausible scenario, the custodians of civilization’s records should develop library mission statements that will keep each library’s true purpose before everyone’s eyes. The core of such a statement should be mounted in large letters on a very public wall at eye level, not hidden on the library home page several mouse clicks away from visibility. In our view, those statements should contain:

Knowledge and understanding, not data and information, are the central concerns of this library.
Human service to human beings and communities is the prime reason this library exists. (Crawford & Gorman, 1995, p. 182)

NOTES


REFERENCES


