Book Reviews

Margaret Rohdy, Editor

The Mirage of Continuity: Reconfiguring Academic Information Resources for the 21st Century. Eds. Brian L. Hawkins and Patricia Battin. Washington, D.C.: Council on Library and Information Resources and Association of American Universities, 1998. 301p. $25 (ISBN 1-887334-59-9) LC98-28434.

In this collection of essays on the impact of the current explosive development in information technology on academe, the editors make the case that digital technology presents challenges that require fundamental changes in the infrastructure of not just libraries, but of the academic institutions in which they exist, as well as changes in the patterns of how scholarly information is produced, used, and distributed. Seventeen academic librarians, educators, university administrators, and information technologists contributed papers to this volume. Because each essay stands on its own, there are inevitable overlaps and gaps. The volume does not proceed smoothly from point to point, nor does each essay flow easily from the one that precedes it. The resulting impression is not of a single coherent edifice, but of a collection of smaller buildings, each useful in its own right, but with uncertain relationships with its neighbors. These factors might make reading this book difficult, but the work is nonetheless important, and one that warrants perseverance.

Those who write about the future of libraries commonly describe possible developments as inevitabilities and treat challenges as exciting opportunities. In contrast, the vision presented in *The Mirage of Continuity* is an inexorable and difficult future where the decision will not be whether we wish to alter practices, but instead, since we must change, how we can continue to fulfill our mission. The question is not how libraries must change, but whether libraries as discrete entities with their own collections, attached to individual universities, will continue to exist. The fact that the essayists do not describe these potential changes as fun commands attention. It is tempting to disregard predictions of wide-eyed techno-enthusiasts, but harder to dismiss this group of scholars who are remarkably unenthusiastic and give the impression of having come to their conclusions reluctantly. Their collective message, the breadth of concerns covered, and the uncanny agreement among papers are compelling.

In the first section, "Defining the Problem," the authors describe the nature of the changes facing academe as a result of the computer revolution. They assert that the incrementalist approach to change that is characteristic of both universities and libraries and the practice of viewing each development as another point along a continuum will no longer serve. Information distribution, retrieval, and use will be so different from the way they were when our current academic structures were developed that the future will be discontinuous from the past, and radical modifications of the academic enterprise will be required. To establish the context for these changes, this section includes a summary of the history of universities in the United States, the role and culture of the faculty, trends in higher education, and societal expectations.

The section titled "Integrating Information Resources with the Institutional Mission" is a provocative articulation of the purposes and responsibilities of

universities: producing knowledge, affording access to academic communities, providing and managing information resources, and serving as a means of representing accomplishment. It also is a pointed discussion of the patterns of scholarly communication and the interrelationships of faculty research, academic evaluation, publishing patterns, research libraries, and intellectual property rights. Emerging information technologies may both demand and enable restructuring of academe to assure that these purposes and responsibilities are satisfied. The structure and authoritativeness of library collections and the assumption by libraries of responsibility for preservation are contrasted to the relatively unstructured, uncontrolled, and non-preservationist nature of the Internet.

In the section "Challenges in Implementation," after noting the increasingly prohibitive costs of materials, personnel, and space, Brian Hawkins states that "As great as the economic threats to libraries are, the greater threat is the perception that technology will solve these problems . . ." (129). He argues in favor of a new paradigm for collecting and providing access to information, involving de-institutionalization and collective remote data repositories. Richard N. Katz outlines assumptions underlying "the premise that academic information resources must be reconfigured in the first significant way since the opening of the Alexandrian Library" (155), and describes their implications, ranging from an imperative for collaboration among all segments of the university, to the need for standards and for rethinking intellectual property rights. In the other papers, the essayists explore issues relating to creation, preservation of, and access to digital information resources, and posit that regardless of how or where information resources are held, current means of bibliographic control and information retrieval will be insufficient for the needs of users, though the Web may be even less satisfactory.

In "Leadership, Staffing and Management," the future information resources professional is described as an "eclectic member of the university community, and a person who can span the boundaries of the various subunits on campus" (265), but in order for such persons to exist and to provide the kind of leadership necessary for steering a course through a transformational period, there will need to be substantive modifications in the preparation and mindset of these professionals, as well as changes in how such people are viewed in the university, and even in how successes are measured.

The Mirage of Continuity is an uncomfortable book to read. It is a success like few others in provoking thought and persuading readers that the digital revolution will bring changes that cannot be ignored until we retire and that cannot be handled by grafting solutions onto existing structures. The book's particular strength is its breadth of vision. The essayists see the future in the context of academe as a whole rather than in terms of organizational details. Although libraries are central to their discussions, the authors do not treat them as self-contained institutions. Instead, libraries are considered as collections of functions, principles and purposes that have been located in a particular organizational unit, but which may be disaggregated as part of our response to the approaching discontinuity in the world of information resources. This work is not a prescription for the future, and it is not a survival guide. It is instead a detailed, thoughtful, and compelling fair warning, or even a call to arms that academic librarians would do well to take to heart.—*Janet Swan Hill (hilljs@ spot.colorado.edu), University of Colorado Libraries, Boulder*

The Principles and Future of AACR: Proceedings of the International Conference on the Principles and Future of AACR, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, October 23–25, 1997. Ed. Jean Weihs. Ottawa: Canadian Library Association; Chicago, American Library Association, 1998. 272p. $25 (ISBN 0-8389-3493-5) LC 98-34562.

Many of the authors presenting papers at the International Conference on the Principles and Future Development of AACR (Anglo-American Cataloguing