

## Foreword

There have been a number of books on the future of libraries and librarianship. Some would say that far too many such books have been published. This is because the bulk of these books are unrealistically futuristic or technically obsessed or consist of lengthy and arid speculations on the future of higher education, the publishing industry, and the other contexts within which we work. Michael Buckland's book falls into none of these categories. It is both visionary and practical. There is knowledge and information in this book that is of immediate use to librarians, administrators of libraries of all kinds, university administrators, faculty, boards of trustees, and all others interested in the future of library service. It is in this utility, and in the fact that this book is pitched in the medium term, that its strengths and value can be found.

One of the most telling points made by the author is that, like it or not, libraries will have to deal with the provision of access to electronic documents. He rightly and shrewdly avoids arguments about the exact proportion of such documents compared with the more familiar linear documents of yesterday and today. This is pragmatism at its best. *Que sera, sera*, and it behooves all of us to plan for what we know will happen before we plan for what might happen. It seems most likely that the library will be dealing with documents of all kinds for the foreseeable future and, probably, indefinitely. The mix will be different and the library of the future may look different, but, as Michael Buckland points out, librarianship has enduring values and enduring ends. The wisdom of the assessment of the future found in this book is that it keeps those values and ends firmly in sight, while regarding as sacred none of the means we use and have used to achieve them.

It is very easy to accept the familiar without question. It is also easy to assume that the predicted future will remedy the failings of the past and present. Michael Buckland does neither of these things. His analysis of the "Paper Library" (the library of linear documents controlled by paper files) and the "Automated Library" (the library of linear documents controlled by electronic files) is deceptively simple, as are all worthwhile insights. In reading the sections of this book devoted to these topics, one can see very clearly where we have been, where we are, and where we may be going. His analysis is a penetrating light shone on the familiar that shows those with eyes to see that unquestioned assumptions are dangerously misleading. When the libraries of yesterday and today are contrasted with the hypothetical library of tomorrow—the Electronic Library—one does not have to agree with every jot and tittle of the author's analysis to realize how important it is to define the destination *before* one equips oneself for the journey.

Buckland's Electronic Library is defined as one "...in which documents are stored and can be used in electronic (or similarly machine readable) form." There are two important aspects of this definition. Note that the documents are *stored* and *can be used* in electronic form. First, the fact that they are so stored does not preclude them being printed for use as a conventional text. At present, the prevalence of such printing is making a mockery of the "paperless society" predictions that were so popular a decade ago. It is entirely possible that the Electronic Library will contain not only electronic and linear

(mainly printed) documents but also a hybrid of the two in which the library acts as a kind of publisher-cum-bookseller providing high quality printings of electronic texts or graphics. This would, of course, have a revolutionary effect on the role of libraries and the nature of the publishing and bookselling trades. The second important implication of the definition of the Electronic Library is in the fact that the documents can be used in electronic form. The use of digital electronic documents can go well beyond that of simply reading a text or seeing an image. This flexibility (conferred by the ability to edit, merge, add to, make subsets of, rearrange, etc., electronic documents) will have profound, and not invariably benign, effects of libraries, library users, and library service. These are important matters and everyone involved with libraries should be considering them.

Another cardinal virtue of this book can be found in its emphasis on service to library users. Libraries are, essentially, utilitarian constructs. That which tends toward the greatest happiness of the greatest number is good; that which does not is bad. Libraries exist to serve and to be used. Michael Buckland clearly shows us the way to increase the service that libraries can deliver and to understand the likely demands of the library user of the future. One of the sad consequences of the confusion between means and ends that has been endemic in librarianship is that too many have lost sight of the simple purpose of libraries—to serve as many people as well as we can. Libraries, their collections, and technological advance are not good in themselves. They are means to vital ends—disseminating knowledge and information; preserving the records of culture and civilization; and raising and maintaining the quality of intellectual and social life. It is a considerable achievement to have not only provided a cogent analysis of the past, present, and likely future of libraries but also to have used that analysis to point the way to the practical consequences of change. The author has done all the, too, in a brief compass.

The best books provide us with insights into, and new ways of looking at, things and ideas. This is sometimes called the shock of recognition. *Redesigning Library Services* is such a book. More, it provides us with the ways in which we can use those insights to do practical things that will improve libraries and library service. In essence, what the author is telling us is

here is where we are and where we have been;  
here is the likely direction in which we are going;  
here is the impact of the likely future on libraries, library service, and library users;  
and  
here is how we should organize ourselves and run our libraries to respond to the challenges of change.

This is a useful book because it is practical and an important book because it will color the way in which we see libraries. It is a wonderful antidote to the nihilism that has been induced in some by technological change. It affirms the importance of libraries and shows us how we can have faith in the future of libraries without taking refuge in nostalgia. It is, in the very best sense of the terms, progressive and forward-looking.

Michael Gorman  
Dean of Library Services

California State University, Fresno