

EDITORIAL

STORAGE OF RECORDS

That advertising adventurism in expression is catching up with us seems to be indisputable, for when the scientific spokesman forsakes his usual cautious exactitude and launches into catch phrases, then it is obvious that trained men must have thought that the power of appeal lies with exaggeration!. Thus it is in recent years we hear of explosions everywhere, since human imagination was staggered by the unfortunate and untimely decision to unleash atomic destruction on man. People talked of explosion of sexual energy, population explosion, therapeutic explosion, education explosion, and even information explosion! In most cases, of course, there is only a more than usual rate of expansion, and the only explosion that truly occurs is the extremism employed in the expression, and it is insufficiently stressed that should there be a threat to survival, these conjured up explosions would only be telling many generations later.

However, there seems good reason to believe that short of the world adopting some measures on the negative side of the balance, we could be crowded out morally by complete promiscuity, physically by the multiplication of bodies, and the keeping of the sick and infirm tottering along, and mentally by the storage of rapidly increasing information which we have no time to digest, but are unwilling to discard.

Leaving the first two possibilities to the interested parties which do not seem lacking in number, let us concentrate for the moment on the third. The improvement in the technique of printing has reduced cost and increased circulation. It might take a man anything like a year with a good part of his fortune to get his views published 100 years ago. It is so easy now that even primary school children have their annals to air their views! In medicine alone, the number of journals has so multiplied into thousands that the editors of year books and *Index Medicus* are confining their activity to a proportion of them only. In hospitals, the case sheets of patients increase in bulk as new advances add pages of report and figures. Monographs appear with wearying frequency, and international symposia and subsequent proceedings come out with clockwork regula-

rity, and meanwhile specialities multiply by rapid fission into sub-disciplines to give in due course more and more of print.

A good proportion of the publications is produced, circularised, read, thrown away, pulped, and ready to go round the mill again. However, it has become the duty of institutions to keep record of all these publications, and in fact legislation is enforced in most countries to ensure that records of a useful nature are kept for legal, medical, or academic purposes over a period of years.

Hence practically all institutions soon discover that they are short of storage space for information which, when transformed to print, has bulk, is destructible, gathers dust, and takes up space. Further, the more information one amasses, the greater the difficulty one will experience in looking up a particular one. It is abundantly clear that the storage of records is more than providing the space, but it must also ensure a comparative indestructibility, ready access, and continuous expansion. Badly kept records are useless because they do not satisfy these needs, and to have no record would be unthinkable for the present generation, which is completely dominated by the written word!

It is obvious that some of the solutions in the future would entail a curb on publications in spite of the celebrated concept of the freedom of speech, a systematised destruction other than the natural decay which modern science with the technique of preservation keeps postponing, and, maybe, a different kind of communication which would take less space such as computers, sound tracks and micro-waves. For the time being however, we must rapidly evolve a method of storage so that information can be kept and yet be available for use. For this, we have mercifully some effective means in microfilming, and even micro-dots where the filming is reduced to such sizes that a microscopical scale of magnification is necessary. This will certainly increase our effective storage space a hundred to several hundred-fold. Retrieving systems with electronic means are equally available, and for the moment it looks as if that we have the means to postpone the threat of information storage explosion for many more years.

But the cost of these new techniques is still prohibitive for a single institution, and other than in countries where money does not matter—a state of bliss which is not yet ours, very few can really entertain the idea on an institutional basis. It would appear that for us who have information to gather and store like everybody else, and not enough money to spend to be lavish like a few others, we should think along a national level, and evolve a system of records storage for the whole nation. This will give us the sufficient concentration to ensure that there

is enough demand for the system to be effectively used, and enough finance to employ the most up-to-date system available today. A nation wide record-storage body should be set up, and supported, and for the beginning, the records of Government departments, hospitals, public institutions, and national bodies can go into it. This should give us the efficiency of a modern nation in record keeping, and at the lowest cost possible at the same time.

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