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From Bibliography to Documentography

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In 1985 McKenzie, an expert in historical printing methods, declared in a prominent lecture and subsequent publications that bibliography as the study of texts should extend beyond printed books to all other media and include “verbal, visual, oral, and numeric data, ... everything from epigraphy to the latest forms of discography” and geographic features that form the ingredients of what is in fact a verbal text, such as the Gnoilya tmerga stone in the Australian outback associated with an ancient legend about a wounded dog that turned into a large stone which not only documents the story but might revert to being the dog again (McKenzie, 1999, p. 13). This declaration is widely known in bibliographical circles but appears to have attracted little constructive intellectual engagement.

In 1951 French librarian Suzanne Briet declared that a wild antelope if captured would become a document if placed into a taxonomy and in a cage. The idea was that a document was by definition evidence concerning something, that the antelope was itself a source of evidence (comparable to a book) about itself, and that since bibliography was concerned with describing and discovering documents, bibliography should in principle be expanded accordingly, although Briet preferred to use the term *documentation* rather than *bibliography* (Briet, 1951/2006). Already in 1948, one of Briet’s students, Robert Pagès, had made the same kind of argument using, as examples of documents, a gorilla in a cage, Napoleon’s hat, and an unidentified Egyptian mummy (Pagès, 1948). Pagès preferred to use *documentography*, rather than *bibliography*, for this extended sense of document. A similarly broad use of *document* for any object that makes something evident can be found in the writings of Paul Otlet and historians of the *Annales* school (e.g., Febvre, 1934, p. 103; Otlet, 1934).

The Scope of Bibliography

“Bibliography,” literally “book-writing,” denoted the copying of texts in ancient Greece and in Europe until the seventeenth century, when it was increasingly used to mean writing *about* texts. Before then lists of books had not been called bibliographies. Other terms were used, such as catalog or index.

There have been repeated proposals to use *bibliology* for the study of books to distinguish it from the use of *bibliography* for descriptions of books (e.g., Pollard, 1911). The distinction would be comparable to the difference between *biology* and *biography*, but bibliography has remained in use for both.

A significant distinction now made in document theory is the difference between documents by intention and documents by attribution. McKenzie (1999), concerned with a broad sense of texts, addressed objects intended to signify something, whether created as documents or made into documents with an intention to communicate. Briet and Pagès adopted a more semiotic view and were also concerned with situations in which an object is regarded as signifying

something whether or not its creator, if any, intended it to signify something, which widens the scope greatly (Buckland, 2017).

Bibliography as Interface

A bibliography, a list, is an interface to the documents listed. As such it is an alternative to asking a human librarian or scholar. Before the nineteenth century, “librarian” denoted a position rather than a profession. Libraries were administered by a scholar librarian whose knowledge of literature, especially what was in the local collection, made him the natural interface for readers. But although this might seem an ideal solution, the role of the scholar librarian was problematic in practical terms. For example, a human does not scale well. The relentless increases in knowledge, in publications, in readers, and, perhaps, in inquiry meant that the human scholar librarian was deceptively able to cope. Also, there was risk. What if the scholar librarian on whose knowledge readers depended were to become forgetful, move to different library, retire, or die? This difficulty was illustrated in Bavaria when around 1800 some two hundred confiscated monastic libraries were sent to Munich for addition to the royal library. The scholar librarians simply could not cope. The situation was resolved by Martin Schrettinger who advocated building a bibliographical system—essentially giving each book a unique shelf location and providing a catalog—for readers and librarians to depend on.

Schrettinger published a book describing his approach which described a library as a large collection of books whose organization enables every knowledge seeker to use every treatise it contains without unnecessary delay according to his needs. He coined the term *library science* to describe his approach (Schrettinger, 1808, p. 29).

However, Schrettinger’s emphasis on building systems for readers’ self-service generated a protest from Friedrich Ebert, a distinguished scholar librarian, who denounced the creation of artificial systems to replace human advice. Ironically, Ebert fell from a ladder in his library and died young, which illustrated a disadvantage of reliance on human experts. (Garret, 1999; Jochum, 1991).

The merits of catalogs and bibliographical systems, like the development of information technology generally, have been widely celebrated as a triumph in mitigating the constraints of time and space through the fixity and portability of records. The demerits of formal systems have been much less discussed, but arise because fixity also means obsolescence and portability entails loss of context.

Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Bibliography

Schrettinger's approach, followed by Melvil Dewey and others, led to librarianship becoming an increasingly technical and professional occupation. One could still ask a librarian for help, of course, but the first step became self-service using the library system: consulting the catalog, scanning the subject-classified shelves, or looking in bibliographies and other reference works which were made available as publications, library collections, and number of readers grew rapidly.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century bibliography received greatly increased attention. In 1892 the Bibliographical Society was founded in London to promote both "material bibliography" (the study of books as objects) and "intellectual bibliography" (study of the what the books were about). The members of the society focused on material bibliography, but others, including Paul Otlet and Herbert Field, focused on intellectual bibliography and a golden era of bibliography emerged.

Nevertheless the twentieth century brought more challenges. There was a great increase in documents, the so-called "information explosion." Also, documents became more important as well as more numerous because society was increasingly characterized by the division of labor, which depends on an increased communication and coordination, largely in the form of documents. In addition, new technology supported a wide range of new media which enable the creation of and dissemination of vicarious experiences. An outcome was the rise not only of mass communications but also the symbolic use of existing objects. For example, to promote tourism an old village might be presented as cultural heritage and in expositions old objects may be presented as traditional. Robert Pagès, who became a noted social psychologist, provided a media analysis of these developments. In the seventeenth century, he explained, Descartes had distinguished between lived experience and bookish knowledge. The former we know first-hand, the latter we know indirectly, at second-hand, and it should be accepted only with caution. However, Pagès argued, transformative changes in the eighteenth century onwards undermined this distinction. New media provide us with vivid vicarious experiences and through the creative use of collages and sequencing almost any narrative can be made to appear realistic. Moreover, individuality is increasingly lost as society becomes more embracing with mass communications, mass production, mass political movements, conscription, and total warfare. The result is a proliferation of documentary experiences blurring any separation of lived experience and bookish knowledge (Pagès, 1948).

Biblio-graphing: What is Written

The kinds of writing associated with bibliography start with *referring*: citing, mentioning, and naming, which may not imply some meaning but generally does. Bibliographical work is essentially descriptive, concerned with representing and documenting. Copying could be seen as extreme case of representation. Enumeration determines what is included. Listing places items in order. Shared components of description constitute subsets and manipulation of subsets allows their presentation and visualization.

A mention is a statement. Each statement, each bibliographical record, can be seen as a (small) document and a bibliography (a set of statements) is also itself a document.

Affordances: Bibliographies' Powers

Patrick Wilson's classic examination of bibliography, *Two Kinds of Power: An Essay on Bibliographical Control* (1968), is framed in terms of two different but related "powers": Description and exploitation, meaning support for selection for some purpose. Nowadays, the term *affordance* is commonly used instead of power. As an example, one might say that an affordance of speed bumps on a road is to slow vehicles. The bumps do not directly cause vehicles to go more slowly, but vehicles are driven more slowly as a consequence of the existence of speed bumps which would otherwise result in discomfort for passengers and possibly damage to the vehicle.

Our interests differ from Wilson's and for our purpose we have identified six affordances of bibliographies:

1. *Description*: Descriptions are used to inform and to learn about. This is Wilson's first power.
2. *Disambiguation*: Description is associated with disambiguation because adding additional description until differences emerge is a common way to disambiguate, but disambiguation can also be achieved by other means, e.g. assigning unique identifiers.
3. *Surrogacy*: A bibliographical record may serve as a substitute if we trust the description and the original document is not conveniently available.
4. *Discovery*: Records are used for discovery and selection. This is Wilson's second power.
5. *Relationship*: Referring from one record to another creates relationships and networks.
6. *Analysis*: Any aspect of bibliographical records can be analyzed. Citation analysis is one example.

Back to the Examples

How should one describe an antelope-as-document or a stone with a legend? The *Chicago Manual of Style* (University of Chicago, 2017) provides no guidance. Library cataloging code rules for 3-D objects and realia do exist but they are not suitable for antelopes or dog stones. However, other well-developed specialized reference genres do exist: atlases, biographical dictionaries, directories, encyclopedias, chronologies, manuals, and other varieties. One could use a biological record as a bibliographical record for an antelope. For example, the online *Encyclopedia of Life* (2018) has a fine record for a pronghorn antelope. This is, however, a description of a species and would need to be adapted to be a record for some particular antelope and for the reasons why this individual antelope would be of documentary or other interest.

Similarly, one might expect a toponym directory (a place name gazetteer) to include records for culturally significant locations, such as McKenzie's dog stone, although such resources tend to focus in physical rather than cultural features. *The Oxford Illustrated Literary Guide to Great Britain and Ireland* (Eagle, 1981) provides a possible model that could be adapted to document specific cultural objects in the landscape. It lists locations associated with authors, publications, and events described in literary works. It is bibliographical because it describes publications. But is also biographical, geographical, historical, and literary, which is a good reminder that bibliographies are not fully separable from other reference genres. Although it is convenient to think in terms of distinct genres of reference works, reality is more complex. For example, a typical dictionary is not likely to be confused with a typical encyclopedia because they are clearly different in appearance and content, but so many intermediate forms exist that in practice one finds a range of examples on a continuum between dictionary and encyclopedia (McArthur, 1985).

Affordances of Reference Works

We have noted six affordances of bibliographies. What, we may ask, are the affordances of other genres of reference works? For persons one would consult a biographical dictionary or "who's who" in which each entry reveals and describes an individual's life. Each individual is carefully disambiguated from any other individual with the same name. One routinely consults a biographical dictionary for information as a more convenient alternative to asking the person, who many be deceased or otherwise inaccessible. Such a reference work could be used to discover individuals with particular attributes of interest if it is indexed or searchable. The detailed descriptions could be used to identify sets of related

individuals with family ties or shared characteristics such as year of birth or profession. The descriptive data can support statistical analyses of groups of individuals (prosopography).

The same kinds of affordances also characterize place name gazetteers, field guides to flora and fauna, catalogues raisonnées of art works, and chronologies of events. These affordances are the same as those identified for bibliographies and it appears that all types of reference works have these same affordances or could, depending on the completeness of the entries.

Summary: Bibliographies and Reference Works

Bibliographies may be considered separately from other types of reference work but they are reference works. They qualify through the primary characteristic of a reference work that it is structured as a list such that one can consult specific points in structure without having to read through serially from the beginning. Ordinarily bibliographies cite sources of evidence but conventional bibliographical practice is not currently adequate for describing an antelope or a culturally meaningful stone. Although it is convenient to identify different genres of reference works, there is, in practice a continuum of forms. They have the same affordances, or could have depending on their completeness. The arrangements differ, but the entries have the same ingredients and are, ultimately, drawn from the same sources. They have the same evaluation criteria: purpose, scope, current, cost, authority, objectivity, accuracy, frequency, and so on.

Reference works as a class describe any signifying thing.

Conclusion

There are many varieties of bibliography: analytical, descriptive, enumerative, historical, intellectual, material, subject, systematic, textual, and more. For bibliology, the study of the printed book, Briet's antelope and McKenzie's dogstone are not merely anomalies but simply irrelevant. But this conclusion implies a need for parallel study of each other media form as necessary.

For subject bibliography, as the representation of knowledge or evidence, it is the limitation to printed documents, and the exclusion of other sources of evidence, that is an anomaly.

Traditional concerns in bibliography include provenance, authenticity, completeness, authorship, trustworthiness, accessibility, legal status, topicality, meaning, preservation, and curation. But these are, or should be, our concerns of all media. And if we prefer not to expand the meaning of "bibliography," then we need some other term, such as "documentography" to denote the theory and practice of reference works as a class.

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