TITLE: Reference: An Island of Chaos in a Sea of Order
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ABSTRACT: A discussion of how the nature of reference makes it a center of innovation in a library.
KEYWORDS: reference
Reference: An Island of Chaos in a Sea of Order

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Lazerow Lecture
Pratt School of Information and Library Science
Agenda

• The Sea of Order
• Seduction of Classification
• The Extreme Consequences
• Islands of Chaos
• References Opportunity
• Getting the Reference House in Order
• New Horizons for Librarianship
Library as Sea of Order

- Building Grand Cathedrals of Knowledge
- Select, Describe, Organize, Retrieve, Use
Classical View
Bacon (1623)/Jefferson

- Memory (History)
- Reason (Philosophy)
- Imagination (Fine Arts)
Samuel Johnson (1731)

- Philology: the Study of Words and other Signs
- Philosophy: the Study of Things signified by them
Dewey

- General works (000)
- Philosophy (100)
- Religion (200)
- Social sciences (300)
- Philology (400)
- Pure science (500)
- Useful arts/applied science (600)
- Fine arts (700)
- Literature (800)
- History/biography (900).
Personality—what the object is primarily “about.” This is considered the “main facet.”

Matter—the material of the object

Energy—the processes or activities that take place in relation to the object

Space—where the object happens or exists

Time—when the object occurs
Bibliofundamentalism

• An Extreme that Sees the Role of the Library as a Haven of Order and Quality

• Danger of Classification in Place of Understanding

• Often Non-Librarian’s View/Stereotype

• Ultimate Focus on Collection
Fundamentalism in Disguise

- Bibliographic Instruction
- Library Marketing
- Library Web Sites
- Why is the Building on the Site?
- “L” Schools vs. “I” Schools
Fundamentalism in Disguise

- A Knowledge Organization in an Information Age
- High Quality vs the Open Web
- “Us” vs. “Them”
Why This Won’t Work

- Amount of Digital Information is Growing Exponentially
  - Doubles Every 18 months
- ...and Most of This is Digital
- ...and Less and Less of This is Text
- Tera-Scale Librarianship (Gigabytes per Mile)
The Problem: Internal

- Bureaucracy and Reductionism assumes:
  - Static, discoverable environment
  - Unimpeded Flow of Information
  - Real Life is Complex!
Daedalus’ Maze
Daedalus’ Maze

- Libraries have become trapped in their own labyrinth of tools and organizations
Daedalus’ Maze

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- MARC, AACR2, DDC, LCSH, Z39.50, NISO, OPAC, DCMI, LibQual, ILL, AAT, GAC, ILS, LSTA, OCLC
Daedalus’ Maze

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• MARC, AACR2, DDC, LCSH, Z39.50, NISO, OPAC, DCMI, LibQual, ILL, AAT, GAC, ILS, LSTA, OCLC

• Paralysis through Analysis
Pre-Internet
Pre-Internet
Pre-Internet
Pre-Internet

Pre-Web

Google
Pre-Internet

Pre-Web

Google
Pre-Internet

Pre-Web

Google

Future?
Pre-Internet

Pre-Web

Google

Future?
“The departments of human knowledge are so numerous, their intersections so great, their changes so frequent, and their variety so confusing, that it is impossible to show that they proceed from one source or germ, or that they can be arranged so that each enquirer will find the complete literature of his subject at one fixed place.”

Reference’s Role?
Reference’s Role?
The Need to Change
The Need to Change

• We’re Top Heavy in Consortia and Organizations
The Need to Change

- We’re Top Heavy in Consortia and Organizations
- Need to Adapt the Tools we Helped Create to Become a More Agile Profession and Better Share Knowledge, Resources and Abilities
The Need to Change

• We’re Top Heavy in Consortia and Organizations

• Need to Adapt the Tools we Helped Create to Become a More Agile Profession and Better Share Knowledge, Resources and Abilities

• Rather than Trying to Classify the Web, Let’s Adopt, Improve and Rule It!
Future?
Future?

OR

Future!
Islands of Chaos

- Reference is Inherently Inductive and User-Centered
  - Isn’t Everyone?
- Reference is an Authoring Process
Reference as Tool Builders

• Who is Better Equipped to Create the New Information Tools?

• Who Uses More Information Tools in the Library...and Sees User Reactions?

• Pathfinders, Bibliographies, Websites, Blogs, Wiki’s
Chaos vs Fundamentalism

- CORC vs SumbleUpon
- CDRS vs Technorati
Key Technologies

- RSS/Blogs
- Web/Wiki
- IM
  - “Chat Reference” is not chat
- E-Mail
- 4 Color Offset Printers and Large Format Ink Jet Printers
- Virtual Reference
“The use of human intermediation to answer questions in a digital environment”
- The Digital Reference Research Agenda
“The use of human intermediation to answer questions in a digital environment”
- The Digital Reference Research Agenda

An agenda to increase the technical knowledge (and capacity) of libraries and to build bridges (and respect) to the digital library and other communities.
Virtual Reference is Different

- Unlike Face to Face Reference a Transaction Trail and Document is the Default, not the Exception

- Reference Authoring
Some Examples
A New Twist on "Authority Control"
• David Lankes: What is the Dewey number for books on tattoos?

• A librarian will be with you in about a minute. Please do not use your "back", "forward", or "refresh" buttons, or you will be disconnected.

• [Librarian - A librarian has joined the session.]

• Librarian: Hi. I'll try to find that for you.

• Librarian: The books in our library are at call number 391.65 and 391.6
Librarian: I'm answering your question from a library in Calif. What library do you go to? I could look and see whether there are books there on tattoos.

David Lankes: do you know the corresponding dewey that would be?

Librarian: Would you like for me to do that?

David Lankes: I don't need a specific book, just making a funny graphic for a talk I'm doing.

Librarian: Libraries use the same dewey number for the books. That way you could go to another library and look for a similar book in the same area.
Librarian: And you should find books in your library under the same dewey number I just gave you, if your library has books on the subject.

David Lankes: I know, but I would like to know the actual subject hitting that matches the dewey number.

Librarian: When I searched my catalog, I used the keyword term "tattoos".

David Lankes: Do you know a place on the web, or have access to the Dewey classification system?

David Lankes: Perhaps WebDewey?

Librarian: WebDewey? What is that? I looked up ...

Librarian: tattoos in our online system at Books In Print and found the book "Tattoo Icon" and they list it at 391.65

David Lankes: WebDewey is a way to look up terms in the dewey classification system...in essence the resource they used to assign that book to the number 391.65

David Lankes: It's no big deal. The number was a great help.
• Librarian: Another title: "Tattoo Nation: Portraits of Celebrity Body Art" has the dewey number: 391.6/5

• Librarian: Is there a site on the internet for WebDewey?

• David Lankes: It probably is just called "tattoos" in dewey, but I'll be talking with catalogers and sometimes they actually know what names the actual numbers correspond to. Knowing a little about Dewey it might be either tattoos or body art or something else.


• David Lankes: You have to pay for access.

• Librarian: I'm not a cataloger. You probably have more knowledge on this than I do at the moment.

• David Lankes: No problem. Thanks again. Have a good day.
Librarian: You are right that it could be found under different keywords. I was trying to find the most direct, quick answer to your question.

David Lankes: And I got it. I asked for the number. That's what I needed.

Librarian: You’re welcome. Thanks for the challenge. Have a good day, yourself.

David Lankes: The name was just a follow-up if you knew.

David Lankes: bye.
Post Game Summary
## Post Game Summary

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Librarian: 25%
Dave: 25%
Me: 75%
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Me: 75%
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Uncomfortable?

- Reference is at once both the most public, and private function the library offers.
- While we call it public service, we don’t have the same transparency as technical service.
Libraries Have it Backwards

- Reference is an Unnatural Act
- Admitting Ignorance is Uncomfortable - the Greedy Librarian Problem
- Self Promotion is Human Nature
Old Model

- Library as a Separate Process and Collection from the Community’s Core Business
- Enhance and Facilitate
- Emphasis on External Documents
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New Model

• Library as Information “Collector” and “Enhancer” of the Organization’s Information

• Institutional Repository

• Emphasis on Synthesis

• Sees the Complexity of the Served Community
“I'm not a cataloger”
Defining the Team

- Core Librarianship: Access, Organization, Design, Conservation
- Extended Family: Coders, Marketers, Content Experts
- Everything Old is New Again - Subject Scholars, Historians, etc...
You Say You Want a Revolution...

- Recognize Your Own Strengths
- Make Those Indispensable to the Community
- Assimilate a Team
You Say You Want a Revolution...

- Recognize Your Own Strengths
- Make Those Indispensable to the Community
- Assimilate a Team
Questions,
Corrections,
Arguments