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LIS 530, Winter 2003

Response Paper

Option 1: What place does bibliographic control have in the age of the Internet and the Web?

The Internet is a very late-comer to the world of information organization. Librarians have been cataloging books ever since the Library of Alexandria, but the Internet has only been accessible to the average person since the early 1990's. Someone (maybe Matt Saxton) said last semester that the Internet today is much like the early years of movable-type book printing, in that everyone is publishing at will, without standards of quality or even of book format. In terms of bibliographic control, the age of movable type was as revolutionary as the Internet age is now; for example, before movable type, the concepts of "edition" or "identical copy" did not exist. As the Internet progresses, it is my belief that new concepts will evolve to deal with the new challenges of a distributed-network information world.

One of the fundamental distinctions of bibliographic control is the distinction between the work and the document, between the content and the container. This distinction becomes very problematic when transferred to a non-physical document. Even a CD-ROM is relatively easy to grasp using these concepts; although the information is digital, it is stored on a piece of plastic and aluminum which can be cataloged and shelved. A document on a remote server, on the other hand, has no physical manifestation at all. Its only residue of "physical" characteristics is the URL specifying its location.

If an Internet resource, for example a web page, already has a location, then half of the "mark and park" process is already done; the URL can substitute for a call number which specifies the location of the resource. However, access to that resource is far from assured. The page could be moved or deleted, or the whole site could disappear. There are a myriad of reasons why a resource could become unavailable. Of what worth is bibliographic control when access to the desired resources cannot be assured?

One of Wilson's five dimensions of power is supply, referring in some sense to physical control over a resource. (Wilson calls it an "item," but that terminology is only truly applicable to physical objects.)[1] An information system can provide a hyperlink to

[1] Patrick Wilson, *Two Kinds of Power. An Essay on Bibliographical Control*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968, 37-38.

a webpage but has no further control over it; it does not even have any control over whether the resource still exists or not. In terms of evaluating systems on their supply of resources, broken links would rank very low. Google's solution to the problem of disappearing pages is to cache the page so that the content can still be retrieved once the document is gone; however, such a cache is not a substitute for the original resource.

Even if a remote resource does not disappear, its content could change. Content could be added, deleted, updated, or otherwise modified, so that the assigned "markings" no longer apply. Some web pages are even dynamically generated as they are requested, so that there is no static resource. While this dynamism is not as much of a problem as the flat-out disappearance of a resource, it nevertheless poses difficulties in classifying resources which cannot be trusted to stay put.

Essentially, the ways in which bibliographic control has been practiced over the past few centuries are out of step with the nature of resources published over the Internet or, more specifically, the World Wide Web. If the purpose of bibliographic control is to provide access to information resources, then the kind of control applied to static, physical documents is woefully inadequate for the Web. On the other hand, the Web is in dire need of better access methods than keyword searching, and librarians must provide that access, through adaptation of the principles of bibliographic control to this maturing medium.

Wilson, Patrick. *Two Kinds of Power. An Essay on Bibliographical Control*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1968.