Bibliographic Control of Media: One Step Closer

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THE WINTER 1978 ISSUE of *Library Trends* characterizes union lists of audiovisual holdings as "one of the highly attractive projects for consortia."[1] This is a summary of the history and philosophy of such a project.

The men and women who organized the Consortium of University Film Centers (CUFC) in 1970, although members and officers of other professional organizations, discovered that their common problems and perspectives would benefit from a separate association which could better identify and deal with their needs and opportunities. The thrust of CUFC's purpose and philosophy is well described in its constitution as follows:

a. To assist in making film more accessible, to promote its widespread and most effective use, and to recommend optimal standards of service and distribution;

b. To foster cooperative planning among universities, institutions, agencies, foundations, and organizations in the solving of mutual problems;

c. To gather and disseminate information on improved procedures and new developments, and to report useful statistics through common reporting terminology;

d. To reduce waste of resources and unnecessary duplication of effort, through open sharing and cooperative exchange among members;

e. To develop and provide programs which have real economic benefits and privileges to its membership; and

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f. To inspire, generate, and coordinate research and scholarship which may further these purposes and objectives.[2]

This organization has the good fortune to number among its members many who were aware of these needs, which were first brought formally to the attention of the profession by a national "Work Conference on Bibliographic Control of Newer Educational Media," prepared and given at Indiana University in 1960 by Margaret Rufsvold and Carolyn Guss. The proceedings of this conference[3] became a benchmark report. More familiar to readers of this journal will be the ALA volume which definitively described the need for the related professions in 1972: *Bibliographic Control of Nonprint Media,*[4] a work stemming from a USOE media institute.

Those members of the "new" consortium who were aware of the need for bibliographic control formed a Data Bank Committee, which a fortunate and stubborn remnant saw through eight years of painful metamorphoses to a finished product. The *Educational Film Locator* will contain extensive and highly reliable information on the geographically identified holdings of fifty university film rental centers.[5] This committee was faced with the task of bridging the chasm between those minds which spurn the use of the computer for various reasons, and those minds which see in this sophisticated tool some hope of approximating control of the complexity of knowledge given into their charge. The committee found, as others of its kind will verify, that this was a time-consuming and intricate process, reminiscent of some medieval penance assigned for the perfection of patience.

The vision of the possibilities in computerized cataloging first expressed itself in the media profession in 1966, in the Department of Audiovisual Instruction of the National Education Association (now AECT: Association for Educational Communications and Technology). A 2-pronged task force under the leadership of executive secretary Anna L. Hyer was asked to work on cataloging standards for educational media, and on coding standards for the computerization of cataloging.[6]

The Data Bank Committee of CUFC was propitiously chaired for its first several years by W.J. Quinly of Florida State University, one of those key people endowed by life with a grounding in library and media theory and practice. As head of the media center at his own university, Quinly was keenly aware of the practical problems posed by the cataloging of media to certain aspects of the currently prevalent theory-prescription proposed a dozen years ago. He had already worked for years both in ALA and in its above-mentioned sister organization AECT (as chairman of the

standards committee arm of the original Department of Audiovisual In-
struction thrust) toward the translation of actual needs into a standard,
professionally acceptable methodology, and toward bringing the languages
of the parallel professions into accord. Such an undertaking is an ambition
whose presumption can only be gauged by those who have sat with the
terminology committee of a professional organization and watched its
struggle to bring its own vocabulary into accord. The visible monument
to this quarter-century of raw endurance is the AECT-endorsed *Standards
for Cataloging Nonprint Materials,* coauthored by Quinly and Alma
Tillin, which is now in its fourth edition.[7] These standards are in accord
with AACR's revised Chapter 12 on matters of content (with the excep-
tion of a few vocabulary items not relevant to film), but are not yet in
accord with regard to matters of style, and in particular the ISBD punc-
tuation.[8]

There was a long interim period for the Data Bank Committee dur-
ing which it seemed that the absence of any agreement on format (and in
particular on subject heading structure) and the absence of any source of
funding would justify those doomsayers who had from the beginning
termed the project "pie in the sky." The chairmanship in this interim was
borne jointly by W.J. Cuttill of Indiana University and James G. Buter-
baugh, then at the University of Nebraska. Buterbaugh, active also in the
Educational Film Library Association, took advantage of being in New
York to try to interest representatives of R.R. Bowker Company in meeting
with the committee and members of the CUFC board of directors to dis-
cuss a feasibility study. With Bowker's interest expressed in funding and its
professional expertise came the necessary motivation for compromise on
format.

The consortium relied heavily on the flexibility of Bowker's "BIPS"
(Bibliographic Information Publishing System), which includes selection
routines for extraction of records by code (with a view to subject area
catalog spinoff), control of records by separate data fields to a maximum
of 192, a variety of options for output format, etc.[9] Bowker, on the other
hand, relied on the consortium editorial committee's experience in hand-
to-hand combat with problems created by the vagaries in titling and con-
flicts in the sources of title information — which remain the bane of their
existence — for help in establishing the parameters for the system's appli-
cation, in establishing authority files, and in editing the merged data.

The stated aim of the *Locator* project was to produce a cost-effective,
multiple-use reference tool. A range of possible users beyond the film rental
customer was kept in mind: schools, libraries, business and industrial or-

ganizations as film buyers and sellers, and professionals in need of sound bibliographic data. The committee sought to respect and to operate in the spirit of the British project as it was voiced by Antony Croghan: "I started off on one or two basic assumptions because I was a librarian. The first one is that a good catalog is a good thing. . . . I appreciate a good tool, and know what I can do with it. The second one, and this applies a little more precisely to the nonprint media, was that these materials were entitled to the utmost sophistication in cataloging that I knew was possible."[10]

Extant reference tools were examined and discussed in the hope of supplementing rather than duplicating them. Also considered was the need to provide an increased variety of information for which a demand is bound to emerge from the growing trend toward film study courses, the greater level of sophistication of educational film content, and the possibilities inherent in electronic information formats, including the eventuality of linking with other data bases. One primary aim of the project was to provide the film user not only with alternative print source locations of a title with which he/she was already familiar, but to provide, through subject heading structure, a broadening of horizon to a group of alternative title choices.

The annotations are more detailed than is customary in such a large compendium, for the reason that the user is envisioned as deserving of content sufficient to permit judgment of some of the learning objectives which might be met by any particular film, and some idea of the filmic approach where it is in any way significant or unusual. Unfortunately, it was considered not to be cost-effective to introduce retrospectively use notations or a taxonomy of purposes.

Use notations, which might seem invaluable in this era of behavioral objectives, were so far ahead of their time that they were forgotten when "their time" finally arrived. These notations appeared in what might in some respects be considered the prototype of the *Locator*. Charles F. Hoban chaired the American Council on Education's Committee on Motion Pictures in Education, which produced a volume called *Selected Educational Motion Pictures: A Descriptive Encyclopedia* in 1942. As its title indicates, it is selective rather than exhaustive, and covers 500 films reported as valuable "in at least five states," evaluated "in curriculum terms by competent judges."[11] For each film the volume gave the following information: full title information, appropriate grade levels, running time, primary purchase source, release date, rental sources, an "appraisal" giving its suitability for specific purposes, and a fairly exhaustive content synopsis.

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Strangely enough, economic deterrents are not the only persuasions against listing specified objectives. Hoban has wisely observed that such a list can have an effect opposite the intent: "Specification of objectives as observable behavioral outcomes may have the effect of inhibiting the consideration of outcomes which are not easily observed, 'measured,' or counted, thus narrowing the spectrum both of functions and the range of intended behavioral changes."[12] In addition to economic deterrents, evaluative comments today are suspect of subjectivity or of promotional intent — or are, on the other hand, subject to far-fetched charges of "censorship."[13] Where they do appear, they often seem prone to suffer from a warp in the definition of criticism, which has equated it with derogation.

The Data Bank Committee's third period of chairmanship went to the director of the *Locator* project, Willard D. Philipson of the University of Minnesota. His mixture of expertise was also ideal for the timing of his chairmanship, as he had, in addition to his film library management experience, a rich background of training and practice in the automation of data. Together with Emery I. Koltay, Bowker's Director of Serials Bibliography and Standards, Philipson coordinated the final choices for system fields and the application of the system to the data, as well as the scheduling and hosting of the various editorial sessions involving a committee of twelve. This committee was in turn responsible regionally for overseeing the proofreading and preparation of new input in individual film centers.

Koltay and his staff came to the *Locator* project fresh from a triumph which was ideal preparation for the struggle with the vagaries of titling which remain the disgrace of the media production field. This triumph, a cooperative project with the Library of Congress, was the cumulation, standardization and casting in data base format of twenty-one years of international serials title information, "New Serial Titles 1950-1970,"[14] which ALA acknowledged as the contribution of the year in this field (it was published in 1973).

The preparation was completely appropriate, because, as anyone knows who has worked with international serials, in seeking the *Festschrift für Gobbledygook* one finds that it has been absorbed by the *Festschrift für überwhelmende Gobbledygook,* which has been absorbed by *Gobbledygookwissenschaftliche Mitteilungen.* This is more than a little reminiscent of the food chain of producer/distributor changes prevalent in the media field.

CUFC relied on the professionalism of the staff that produced "New Serial Titles 1950-1970" for assistance in the major area of difficulty and

compromise: the list of subject headings. Familiar with the foregone con-
clusion that — in this area in particular — whatever choices are made will
satisfy almost no one, the committee expressed the consensus of CUFC
members that the work should aim for major satisfaction to the average
film user, who would like to find films about cats listed under "Cats."

Bowker's staff patiently and tolerantly assimilated this wish to a pro-
fessional matrix by the incredible feat of hand-sorting the existing heads
in use in the 50 catalogs and reducing each to an entity having both a
Library of Congress and a Dewey Decimal equivalent, resulting in a com-
posite of about 800 categories, with thousands of "see" and "see also"
references. While this is not posited as a definitive solution to the prob-
lem, it is a major concession to the principal criticism of existing indices:
"The greatest obstacle to ... use ... is the subject heading system which
is not based on a standard guide such as Sears or Library of Congress."[15]

The *Locator* will still exhibit some of the shortcomings of the original
cataloging, which came from a full range of contributors, clerical to pro-
fessional, but as a project it has done much to correct the situation de-
plored by Beckwith in 1974: "The published standards have not resulted
in standardization."[16] In the rueful words of one project participant, "At
least we found out why we should have done it right." The person who
has learned that has gained in wisdom.

A long-overdue innovation which the *Locator* will at last bring to
fruition is the provision of each title with a number from the standard
numbering system (ISBN). Two types of numbering systems were estab-
lished for the retrospective assignment: (1) those producers having a large
number of films in the file and a current address assigned their own num-
bers, and (2) for the multitude of small contributors (many of whom have
disappeared), the numbers were assigned by the Bowker staff.

A problem of major dimensions, which has delayed the project to a
degree not imagined by its participants, stemmed from the fact that ap-
plications of the rule for series title main entries were so open to subjective
judgment that most films with two or more title parts had been entered
in at least two ways. Particularly troublesome were the impressively orga-
nized "programs" (a sort of super-series) of the giants of the educational
production field, such as Encyclopaedia Britannica and McGraw-Hill. The
AIBS Biology Series, for example, bears four units apparently appropriate
to title fields in the producer's catalog listing:

"Program" title: Modern Biology Program
"Series" title: AIBS Biology Series

"Unit" title:	Part I — Cell Biology
Film title:	*The World of Life*

In some of these "programs" the films also bore subtitles. Needless to say, in a situation of this kind it is a problem of no mean dimensions to identify the "series" title. In a program of 120 films, consisting of 10 units with 12 films in each unit, the "program" is one kind of series and the "unit" is another. Completely apart from the producer catalog list, the confusion is compounded by the fact that the title frame of the film, from which the information should properly be taken, bears a hybrid of the catalog "program" title with the catalog "series" title, reading: "Modern Biology Series." Understandably, the merger showed cases in which each of these possibilities had been treated as a series title.

High on the list of positive factors for the project was the fact that member consensus favored, and members presumably followed, the universal recommendation of standards manuals (impossible to apply in the situation of many other data banks) that the catalog information be taken from the film itself rather than from surrogate documents which are susceptible to variable input. Most member libraries even checked titles showing more than one entry version on the first printout of the data merger against the film during the first editing phase. In cases of duplication, entries were merged in a direction established by a priority list compiled by the editorial committee and based on their estimation of the degree of care and thoroughness in the application of cataloging standards at each center.

In establishing parameters for the *Locator* system, every effort was made to accommodate known and anticipated complexities, with the double aim of thoroughness and flexibility. The system was projected to accommodate the existence of titles, subtitles, variant titles, former titles, foreign-language and translated titles, and series titles, and to coordinate them by means of a cross-reference structure. Ten field codes were allowed for covering "all" title eventualities. The initial editing of the merger disclosed one possibility that was neither foreseen nor, consequently, provided for: a series may have two legitimate current titles.

Such a case is best illustrated by Kemp R. Niver's rejuvenation project of the historical motion picture holdings of the Library of Congress from archival paper prints. First marketed under the title *Film History — Beginnings of Cinema* (Units 1 through 23) and subsequently as *The First Twenty Years* (Parts 1 through 26), the series legitimately bears both titles in film center catalogs, depending on where and when it was purchased.

The two Niver series are identical in content through Unit 17. From then on, the difference is in mounting, with the exception that one film, a 1901 comedy entitled *Automobile Parade on Coney Island Boulevard,* appears in Unit 22A of the *Film History* version, and is omitted altogether from *The First Twenty Years.* Both series cover the same historical period, 1898-1912 — which makes it a matter of some interest to imagine how the second marketing title was chosen.

Today, with the sheer volume of titles available, exhaustive content treatment is out of the question. Worldwide nontheatrical film production between 1915 and 1977, not including films produced for television, totaled 500,900.[17] Total nontheatrical production in 1977 in the United States alone was 15,390, which represents a 4 percent increase over the previous year's production.[18]

NICEM's 16mm title entries numbered 108,356 in the first quarter of 1976.[19] As of April 1978, Library of Congress MARC film data base tapes contain 43,521 records, of which 20,636 are 16mm film.[20] OCLC's member input of film records stood at 43,112 in March 1978, with Library of Congress MARC film tapes on hand waiting to be loaded, which will double the size of that file.[21] The *Locator* will contain approximately 45,000 records, almost entirely in 16mm film format (a few centers carry video cassette). No work has yet been done to determine the percentage of overlap that might exist among these files.

The only statistics available on potential overlap to date may be found in a doctoral dissertation done at Indiana University in 1974, which included content analysis of ninety-one regional, state and national film rental library catalogs. It revealed that of the 36,000 titles in question, 15,000, or almost one-half, were one-owner titles. These statistics represent extrapolations on the basis of a random sample of 1800 titles in 43 catalogs.[22]

In another study (also done at Indiana) involving "major and minor sources of information about films and ... catalogs of approximately 200 film libraries," statistics extrapolated from a sampling of 732 title entries from approximately 250 chosen documents showed that: (1) no single catalog included as many as 50 percent of these titles, (2) none of the major indices served as a comprehensive source of information, (3) the most comprehensive source of information was the Library of Congress, and (4) the most comprehensive at that date (1971) listed only 40 percent of the titles identified.[23]

The original recommendation of the final report of the Southern California Automated Cataloging research project, which culminated in

the founding of NICEM, was that other centers be established on a nationwide basis: "No one group can supply the services needed by the libraries throughout the country. With the need so great, regional and local centers must be set up to perform these tasks."[24] As Hoban has observed about universities in general, "We have much work ahead to build an educational system of mutuality of interest and support."[25]

It is to be hoped that the figurative meaning of the optimistic philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin, *tout ce qui monte converge*,[26] may apply in the case of these various units: "All that is seeking to be better is moving in the same direction, and will eventually come together."

At the time of this writing, one final editing session for the *Locator* remains to be scheduled. The publication date originally estimated is long past, partly due to unforeseen setbacks and partly to a refusal to compromise quality. Plans are under consideration for methods of regular updating of the file, and for future editions.

The *Locator* is one piece of a giant jigsaw puzzle which, when it is finally assembled, will at last spell "bibliographic control of media" — meaning, for one thing, easy access to the best of what has been, in the interim, evolving into a truly useful and beautiful medium: the educational film.

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