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The Anglo-American Cataloguing Rules Second Edition

Their History and Principles

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History and context

It is possible that the *Anglo-American cataloguing rules, second edition*, is the most spectacularly misnamed bibliographic standard in history. *AACR2* has far less in common with its titular predecessor--the *Anglo-American catalog[u]ing rules of 1967 (AACR1)*--than that code had with its predecessors, the *ALA rules* of 1949, the Library of Congress *Rules for descriptive cataloging* of 1949, and the *Catalog[u]ing rules* of 1908. The description of *AACR2* as a "second edition" arose first from its history--in the early 1970s, the idea was nothing much more than a harmonization of the American and British texts of *AACR1* and some less than fundamental modifications--and then from political expediency. In the later stages of the creation of *AACR2*, it became obvious that this code was to be a radical departure--one that was going to be vociferously opposed by many administrators and bibliographic reactionaries. It is entirely possible that an entirely new name--say, "Integrated cataloguing rules for English-speaking countries"--would have scuppered the whole enterprise. It is also entirely possible that such a new name would have meant that a conference such as this would have been unnecessary and that regular revisions of the code could have taken place in an orderly, non-disputatious manner freed from the idea that change means a new code, an "AACR3." We adhere strongly to the latter view and wish that the significance of the break from the past had been recognized by a new name.

In order to understand *AACR2* fully, one needs to understand that there have been three ages of modern English-language descriptive cataloguing codes.

The first was the 19th century age of the single-person codes--notably those of Panizzi and Cutter. These first age codes had the intellectual coherence that comes from a single controlling intelligence and experience and tended to be based on a combination of principle and of cases.

The second age, which began at almost the same time as the new century was born, was the age of the committee code. In the span of time between the *Cataloguing rules* of 1908 and *AACR1* in 1967, the rules became longer and more elaborate and more and more case based.

The prophet of the third age, the age that was ushered in by *AACR2*, was, of course, Seymour Lubetzky. In his writings and draft rules¹ and in his work for the International Conference on Cataloguing Principles (Paris, 1961), we see a radical departure foreshadowed; a departure that combined the best feature of the first age--a single controlling intelligence--with a rejection of the "case-law" approach of the second age. Many features of *AACR2* were, as it turned out, compromises based on political and practical exigencies but, as we shall demonstrate later, these compromises do not alter the Lubetzkyan ideas that are at the core of the rules. Moreover, all those compromises can be detached from *AACR2* surgically--that is, without compromising the basic principles and integrity of the rules.

Principles

The principles on which *AACR2* is based are:

Notably his *Cataloging rules and principles* (1953) and his *Code of cataloging rules* (1960).

- _ that descriptions are to be formulated in accordance with the specifications of the *International standard bibliographic description (ISBD)*
- _ that all media of communication are treated equally
- _ that descriptions are based on the bibliographic item
- _ that access points are to be derived from the nature of the work being catalogued not the nature of the bibliographic entity being described.

These principles are as valid today and for the foreseeable future as they were when *AACR2* was created. Any revision of *AACR2* must recognize the centrality of these principles and will, therefore, be something that is different from *AACR2* in degree rather than kind.

The importance of *AACR2*

Because it is based on these principles and uses them as the basis for rules, *AACR2* represents a major change, comparable to that of Panizzi's rules and the 1908 *Rules*. The following are the most significant reasons why *AACR2* is the first code of the third age of cataloguing.

1. *AACR2* was the first code to integrate all media in both description **and** access points. It is a well-known and lamented fact that the *ISBD(M)* preceded the *ISBD(G)*--a classic example of the dangers of proceeding from the special to the general. *ISBD(M)* was flawed in that it continued the "book-centric" descriptions of previous codes whereas the later *ISBD(G)*--the basis of Part 1 of *AACR2*--provided, for the first time, a comprehensive, media-neutral descriptive framework.

2. As far as the rules on access points are concerned, part 2 of *AACR2* is the first instance of any cataloguing code dealing with names and titles on a medium-neutral basis -- for example, names are based on the forms found in "chief sources of information," which are determined, medium by medium, with reference to the framework of *ISBD*.
3. *AACR2* is the first cataloguing code that clearly delineates the distinction between **description** (of bibliographic items--now including defined electronic assemblages) and **access** (relating to works and not to manifestations of those works). The language of *AACR2* is not always clear and consistent when it comes to this distinction but the principle is clear and, if the explication of the principle is flawed, that is an editorial not conceptual failing and one relatively easily remedied. In this context, the placing of Parts 1 and 2 of *AACR2* is of significance. The cataloguer is led to proceed from the description of the bibliographic item (book, serial, set of maps, assemblage of electronic data, etc.) to the consideration of the work rather than the other way round.
4. Access points in *AACR2* are based (not always entirely successfully) on the Lubetzkyan principled approach rather than the case law method that had hobbled previous codes. It is true that political/strategic considerations again rear their ugly heads and that *AACR2* contains some hangovers from the past. It is important to note, though, that those "case-law" hangovers are isolated in special

rules that could easily be detached in a future revision (we will return to this point later).

5. *AACR2* is consciously internationalist, albeit from the English language point of view. That internationalism has not only made *AACR2* the most widely used cataloguing code in history and the basis for a number of non-English language codes but has also imposed the burden of remaining responsive to that global use. Proposals to change the nature of *AACR2* should be greeted with considerable caution and a clear appraisal of the consequences of such change for libraries and catalogues throughout the world. This is the first global cataloguing code-- something to be welcomed, not feared, in an era of globalization in bibliographic control, as in so many other areas of life.
6. Though *AACR2* preserved the main entry (yet more of the politics of bibliographic fear reinforced, in this instance, by the existence of the 1xx field in MARC), it showed the way toward the concept of authority records of equal value attached to descriptions and, thus, presages the ultimate elimination of this unnecessary complication of little relevance to the computerized catalogues of today. We stress that the ideas of authorship and of the work remain central to the choice of name and uniform title access points but that this conceptual framework need not dictate the structure of the catalogue and does not call for the selection of one access point over another.

7. *AACR2* is the first code to embody the concept of one person having two or more bibliographic identities--that is, an "author" not necessarily being co-extensive with a person. This is not a purely theoretical point. There is, for example, a book about the police novels of "Ed McBain" and, in framing the subject heading for that work, it is crucial to distinguish one bibliographic persona from others created by the same individual. This innovation is of considerable theoretical importance and represents one of the most radical breaks with past codes.
8. *AACR2* provides an infinitely expandable framework (in both description and access) to accommodate new media and media yet to be and has, hence, eliminated the need for "new" AACRs to deal with the problems such new media may pose.

Implementation of *AACR2*

Those who are old enough to remember the War of *AACR2* in the late 1970s will understand the way in which the weight of existing library practice influenced the implementation of the *Rules* and delayed that implementation in the US for a full year. Those who are, mercifully, too young to recall that squabble may need to be reminded that substantial change has serious economic and political consequences. This is even more true today than it was 20 years ago because of the gigantic number of MARC records (based on *AACR2*) that there are in the world and because of the multitude of online systems that have been designed to manipulate those *AACR2*-derived MARC records. The implementation of *AACR2* in the "author" countries (Australia, Canada, the UK, and the US) differed from country to country--the weight of history falling especially heavily on US libraries. Today, however, each of these countries has a major

investment in its respective national bibliographic infrastructure and, in this era of reduced resources, neither the desire nor the capacity to implement profound change in the cataloguing rules, particularly profound change that is not justifiable on objective cost-benefit grounds.

Description/ISBD

In many ways, the *ISBD* program represents the most successful international endeavour in bibliographic standardization. The study that was used as the basis for the conference that gave rise to the first *ISBD* clearly showed wide variance between national cataloguing agencies and cataloguing codes in the order of descriptive data, the data included and excluded, and the abbreviations used in descriptions. *ISBD* addresses all of these issues and prescribes content, order, and presentation of all descriptive data. Since *AACR2* led the way in incorporating this international standard into cataloguing codes, every single cataloguing code throughout the world (existing and contemplated) has used the *ISBDs* as the basis for their rules on description. This is a major part of the progress that we have made toward Universal Bibliographic Control and it is unthinkable that any revision of *AACR2* should step back from that commitment. If the English-speaking cataloguing community were to decide that there is a need for change in any descriptive detail, its only recourse would be to work with other international interests to change the *ISBDs*. Unilateral change within *AACR2* itself would be a major retrogressive step.

The discussion of Part 1 has been clouded to some extent by the confusion over what is being described, in particular by the belief that the cataloguer always describing a physical object.

In many, if not most, instances a physical object will be co-existent with the bibliographic item but this is not always the case. To take two obvious examples, a serial as a whole is a bibliographic item without being a physical item available to the cataloguer; and an electronic document may or may not be present as a physical item and, even if it is, descriptive data is not all drawn from that physical item. Descriptive data is made up of elements that relate to the physical carrier, elements transcribed from that carrier, elements that describe the recorded knowledge and information, and elements that describe how the carrier is to be used and how to gain access to the recorded knowledge and information it contains. Once the twin concepts of the bibliographic item and the different elements of the description are understood, it is easy to see that discussion of the applicability of Part 1 to electronic documents is, at best, a diversion. The plain fact is that electronic documents can be assimilated into AACR2 cataloguing in exactly the same way as other media of communication have been and media yet unknown will be.

Access points

Part 2 of AACR2 deals with assigning name and title access points to descriptions with the simple aim of making those descriptions retrievable and capable of being grouped together meaningfully. The essential difference between Parts 1 and 2 is that, when cataloguers are creating access points, they are doing so with reference to the work not the bibliographic item or the physical item (even though the three may overlap to a great extent). The concept of "work" is elusive and hard to define with legal rigour, but it is not hard to understand the idea of a defined piece of expression created by a person, persons, or group of persons and possessing a name. There is a world of cultural and bibliographic difference between Sartre's "Being and nothingness"

on the one hand and the on-line "Annual report" of the National Library of Canada on the other, but it is not difficult to recognize them both as works. It is also not difficult to understand that the book of Daphne du Maurier's "Rebecca," the 1940 Hitchcock film, the video of the 1996 BBC television adaptation, and the Claire Bloom audiotape abridgement are all manifestations of the same work. In creating access points, then, the cataloguer is concerned with identifying a work, establishing its standardized name ("uniform title") and the standardized forms of the name(s) of its author(s), and in creating links to other works to which it is related. This process is medium-neutral because the idea of a work is unrelated to any particular form of carrier, even though evidence that goes toward the creation of standard access points may be derived from the carrier (by definition, a work that can be catalogued must have or have had at least one physical carrier).

The fundamental importance of the application of Part 2 of *AACR2* lies in the standardisation that it promotes and in the authority work and authority files that it necessitates. All attempts to provide coherent, accurate access to large numbers of Net and Web resources have been dismal failures, failing to provide either recall or relevance. There is a simple reason why this is and will remain so--keyword searching has proven to be inadequate for decades, especially when compared to standardization of access points and the creation of internally consistent authority files.

Where are we now?

Some have said that there is a need for radical, structural change to *AACR2*. Others, among whom we count ourselves, believe that there is a need for some change but that the change should be gradual, evolutionary, and within the structures and principles of *AACR2*. If we are to

evaluate the need for change and the nature of the change, it is imperative that we understand the real world context of the cataloguing rules. The context is: the need for standardization because of cooperation and copy cataloguing; the emerging importance of the authority control concept as central to electronic bibliographic systems; other standards; and, in North America, the Library of Congress *Rule interpretations*. Most of these factors and influences are self-explanatory but we will comment on the LCRIs. When it comes to LCRIs, North American cataloguers are humble petitioners looking to a mysterious Higher Authority for guidance and LC is a burdened giant accepting the unwanted duty with increasing reluctance. We complain when the word from on high is complicated or not to our liking. This is not LC's fault. They produce LCRI's because we ask them to and would be happy to get out of the interpretive business. Until North American cataloguing matures to the point when we can distinguish between necessary and foolish consistency, the LCRIs will be always with us.

There have been calls from various quarters for "simplification" and some nebulous consequent cost-cutting. Some recommend the use of minimal level records and have implemented less than full descriptions (often ignoring the standardization offered by AACR2 rule 1.0D). The fact that rule exists at all is proof that shorter descriptions do not violate AACR2 principles or practice and, more importantly, do not affect adversely the vast majority of catalogue users. Whether the use of shorter descriptions is a major cost-saver is much more problematic. We believe such savings are marginal at best. "Simplification" is also used, however, in a much more sinister meaning. When one strips away the weasel words and obfuscation, it turns out that what is being advocated is the abandonment of authority work in, for example, the use of "title

page" forms of name without verification. We cannot state too strongly that "simplification" in this sense is a stake through the heart of *AACR2* and cannot be countenanced by any rational interpretation of cataloguing principles. We owe a duty to the users of our libraries and to the cooperative endeavours in which we all participate to provide the highest level of authority control and standardization that we can provide. Anything less is dereliction of duty.

In addition, there has been some extraordinarily misguided and misinformed discussion on the need to create "master records" for works that are manifested in many different physical forms. It is hard to believe that this proposition has been put about by people who are cataloguers. Let us repeat. Descriptions are of bibliographic items (including, nowadays, defined assemblages of electronic data). Descriptions are made up of data derived from the physical means by which the bibliographic item is carried, data transcribed from the carrier, and data descriptive of the carried recorded knowledge or information. It is literally impossible to have a single description of two or more different bibliographic items. Once described, the cataloguer looks at the manifestation in the light of the work (an intellectual construct that, by its nature, cannot be described) in order to assign access points (including uniform titles) and create authority files. This process, which should be understood by anyone who has taken an introductory cataloguing class, clearly demonstrates that the idea of a "master record" for several manifestations of the same work is a cataloguing nonsense.

An agenda for managed change

As we have stated before, we believe in evolutionary change (revisions of *AACR2* that enhance and do not compromise its principles) and not in revolutionary change (the creation of an

"AACR3"). There are some things that could and should be done to improve *AACR2* without changing its structure and principles. In order to illustrate the nature of evolutionary revision and to make specific recommendations, we propose the following 10-point agenda for managed change that is based on a comprehensive review of *AACR2* aimed at ensuring the pervasiveness of its principles.

First, we should get rid of all the "special" case law rules that were imported into Part 2 of *AACR2* for political reasons after Lubetzky resigned as editor (for example, the numerous cases of special religious materials and laws).

Second, we should prune descriptive rules of the over elaborations in particular cases--those that are insufficient for the specialist cataloguer and too much for the general cataloguer (for example, in the rules for music and maps). The needs of the specialist cataloguer and special collections could be catered to by specialist manuals created by the relevant cataloguing bodies and overseen and certified as true interpretations of *AACR2* by the Joint Steering Committee.

Third, we should resolve the issue of "unpublished" items (printed and electronic texts, videos, sound recordings, etc., etc.) in a completely uniform manner across the chapters in Part 1.

Fourth, we should develop new or revised chapters of Part 1 to accommodate new media (especially electronic--including those accessible only remotely).

Fifth, we should study access issues for new media (especially electronic) with a view to seeing how the general rules hold up or need elaboration without creating new case-law rules.

Sixth, we should review Part 2 with the authority record concept in mind (including addressing the main entry issue). The aim should be a catalogue that is based on descriptions of bibliographic items linked to access points of equal weight. This is not the easiest issue to address in concrete terms and is peculiarly unlikely to be addressed effectively by the ponderous committee process. We recommend the commissioning of a consultant to review the whole main entry issue and to come up with specific rule recommendations for review and disposition by JSC.

Seventh, we should resolve the microform issue, not only by persuading LC to drop its "interpretation" that directly contradicts the letter and the spirit of the rule but also to avoid a similar debacle over the question of parallel print and electronic texts.

Eighth, we should do a comprehensive review of the examples with a view to amending those that are no longer relevant and adding examples of new media and problems.

Ninth, we should create a consolidation of the unified MARC format and AACR2 and bear in mind the possibility of a principle-based subject term code to be added to create a complete cataloguer's resource.

Tenth, we should ask LC to review and curtail the LCRI program (for instance, have them cease issuing those not concerned with important questions of access).

The future of the revision process

The revision mechanisms put into place after the first publication of *AACR2* have served us well. They have allowed considered, gradual, democratic change. It appears, though, that principles on which that mechanism was based have faded from the collective memory. Let us review the process; delineate clearly the respective roles of the Joint Steering Committee, the Committee of Principals, the national libraries, and the national committees; and, using a re-invigorated revision mechanism, ensure that the next manifestation of *AACR2* is even better than its predecessors.

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AACR2 represents not just an historic achievement in the Anglo-American cataloguing tradition but also a pioneer and exemplar in the new age of global cataloguing. We should celebrate and consolidate what we have accomplished and work toward making an ever-improving *AACR2* the basis for international cooperation devoted to attaining Universal Bibliographic Control.

Thank you.