Assumptions of naming in information storage and retrieval:
a deconstruction

Hope A. Olson
School of Library and Information Studies, University of Alberta, T6G 2J4

Naming nature is the special business of science. Theories, models, and descriptions are elaborated names. In these acts of naming, the scientist simultaneously constructs and contains nature. Evelyn Fox Keller (1985, 193)

Naming information is the special business of librarians and information professionals. Our theories, models and descriptions, applied in our role as intermediaries between users and information, are as presumptuous as scientists’ construction and containment of nature. As we decide what descriptors and other access points to use we affect access to and the use of information. This process of translating or encoding information into a representation or surrogate, and organizing it into a database is a process of naming. This paper will explore the assumptions that library and information professionals accept when we name information. In writing it I accept the assumption that our work is parallel to that of scientists as described above by Evelyn Fox Keller.

1. Naming and information storage and retrieval (IS&R)

Naming is the act of bestowing a name, of labelling, of creating an identity. It is a means of structuring reality. It imposes a pattern on the world which is meaningful to the name. Each person names reality according to her or his own vision of the world built on past meanings in her or his experience. Each person creates her or his own structure through naming. Naming is, therefore, not a random process even though it is varied. “All naming is of necessity biased and the process of naming is one of encoding that bias, of making a selection of what to emphasize and what to overlook on the basis of a strict use of already patterned materials” (Spender 1985, 104). The other aspect of naming is that it is essential not only for one’s own interpretation of the world, but also in its social function of communication. Naming is a means of interpersonal communication via language. It, therefore, requires a common understanding in addition to its individual bias.

Assumptions have been made about naming and the language with which we perform the task of naming. Philosophers of language have always recognized the subjective nature of language, but have seen the resultant diversity as a stumbling block to mutual comprehension. Andrea Nye, a feminist philosopher of language, has examined the traditions of the philosophy of language from Plato to Wittgenstein, Carnap, Ayer, Husserl, Foucault and Derrida (1987). Nye concludes that all of these thinkers have believed that the diversity and the subjectivity of language need to be standardized. She attributes a parallel attitude to linguists who have taken a reductionist approach. “Factoring out the diverse features of language, the linguist discovers permanent structures that operate not diachronically and mutually as each word is respoken and remeant, but synchronically and uniformly” (Nye 1987, 98). Again there is an effort to impose an authority on language. Not the authority of each individual’s patterns, but an overriding unity. One of the factors stripped off in studying language, whether by linguists or philosophers, is emotional tone. Nye refers to this aspect as “flavor” or “personality,” what Dale Spencer names “bias.”

The result that Nye sees of this general movement in philosophy and linguistics is a license to discount the reliability of direct communication. If such unreliability is accepted then there is no need to hear what is contradictory to one’s own views as it can be deemed unintelligible. “From these refusals to hear, philosophers begin to philosophize: if there is to be a common meaning, it must be constructed, because as long as names are allowed to shift and mutate, they will not be understood and the speaker, removed from ordinary discourse, will remain alone” (Nye 1987, 106). Our parallel question is: do library and information professionals refuse to hear what is outside of a constructed, unified language? If so, what does this mean for our naming? Nye’s and Spender’s work helps to clarify and concretize this question into three more direct questions:
1) is the existence, necessity and desirability of a standardization or unity of language an underlying assumption of our naming process?
2) in our efforts to discover unifying structures which we assume to be present, do we factor out diverse features or variables of language?
3) do we assume that bias/flavour/personality should be excluded to maintain a unity of language?

These three questions address the existence of assumptions of which we may not be consciously aware. The first question is primary, while the other two imply possible effects of unity of language on our research and practice and raise both local and global issues.

II. Methodology

The methodology I have chosen for examining the topic of unity of language in IS&R is deconstruction. Deconstruction is considered the invention of Jacques Derrida and grows from his concept of différance which simultaneously defines difference and defers definition. Différance is “an economic concept designating the production of differing/deferring” (Derrida 1976, 23). It produces difference by identifying binary oppositions, pairs of opposite concepts in which one member of the pair is dominant. The dominant member of a binary opposition implies the other member, that is, it (the dominant member) implies what is not. In this sense binary oppositions are hierarchical, such as white/black or masculine/feminine. The second member is seen as “other” or “marginal.” The process of deconstruction calls attention to the Other to show how the binary opposition is a constructed one and not in some way innate or natural. The binary opposition is defined by différance through the definition of the dominant by the Other and through the deferral of that definition by the recognition that the dominant and the Other are not innately opposite. Différance “defers indefinitely the achievement of totality” (Cornell 1992, 70).

Deconstruction, as the philosophy of the limit, becomes “an exercise of responsibility to otherness” (1992, 82). Cornell applies the philosophy of the limit to the legal system.

Drucilla Cornell, a feminist legal scholar, reinterprets deconstruction as the “philosophy of the limit.” Since the limit is the construction that separates the dominant member of the binary from the Other, it is at the limit that a relationship between the two can be negotiated. The limit is recognized as constructed, rather than innate, but this recognition cannot dismiss the effects of the limit. It is through the limit, which is defined and deferred by différance, that we confront “the beyond,” the Other (1992, 69-70). Cornell proposes that we need to let the Other speak for it/him/herself. That is, we need to develop an ethical relation with the Other.

The problem, of course, with any attempt to let the thing [the Other] speak directly in its language is that it is always blocked by the imposition of our language, our meaning. We are always translating, but without the assurance of the presence of the messianic language that makes translation possible. Yet Derrida continually explores strategies that try to displace the subject [the knowing subject, in this case, library and information professionals] who imposes his meaning on the world around him. What obsesses Derrida is not what he says, but what can be said, given our inevitable placement in language and into pregiven representational systems. His strategies are a promise to the thing, to the remains, to otherness, he knows he cannot fulfill—the promise to let the thing speak (1992, 80).

In IS&R we must be just with information and not appeal to unquestioned assumptions (which Cornell refers to as having “quasi-transcendental status”) to allow us to close our eyes and ears to the Other.
A close scrutiny of the assumptions on which we base our professional theory and practice could open up our structures and in the process make it clear that we do, indeed, have a theoretical base. Since deconstruction is not teleological the results are not what one would traditionally call findings or conclusions. Rather, research using deconstructive approaches reveals what is hidden within basic assumptions. Zora Neale Hurston wrote, “Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose” (1991, 127). Deconstruction is literally radical in that it pokes and pries at the roots of meaning.

The binary opposition which I will explore in relation to the naming of information is that of unity/specificity. The premise upon which LIS names information is that of gathering or collocation. The means are standards which impose authoritative headings. It is this superimposition of a stylized, unified language which I want to examine. So another expression of the unity/specificity binary which I can use is that of standardization/contextualization. When we name information we take it out of its context and standardize it, thus putting it into a context (or text) of our own construction. We construct a new textual reality.

To examine the assumptions on which we base our naming of information I began by searching for articles in the indexing literature, using the Social Sciences Citation Index to ensure that the articles chosen are from the mainstream of the field.\footnote{The process used to identify articles was to: 1) search SSCI online under the term “Indexing,” 2) limit to articles with at least 20 citations (assuming these are more “scholarly” articles and will offer a wider range of choice), 3) identify the authors cited fifteen or more times, 4) identify the most frequently cited articles by these authors.} Having examined a selection of articles and chosen two heavily cited ones, Bookstein and Swanson (1975) and Sparck Jones (1972), for a more detailed textual analysis I realized that the indexing literature is not in itself theoretical. Rather it consists of abstract application of the theoretical literature of information retrieval (IR). Therefore, I begin with an examination of themes in the theoretical literature of IR\footnote{Again, heavily cited articles form the basis of this examination, and in some cases, responses to these articles were also included.} and proceed to the Bookstein and Swanson, and Sparck Jones articles.

For each case I will follow a three step pattern. First, I will establish the binary opposition by identifying the dominant member, its constructed limit and the Other outside of the limit. That is, I will identify the assumption of unity or standardization and the implicit existence of specificity or contextualization.

Second, by discussing the Other, I will reverse the focus of the binary. The presence of specificity will be drawn out of the text. By raising the profile of the Other it becomes apparent that what seem like incompatible members of a binary are not only able to coexist, but are not really separable from each other—that, in fact, it is not an essential, but a constructed dichotomy. The exposure of the binary leads directly to the third step in which I will point toward an ethical relation to the Other in the context of IS&R.

The last part of the paper will relate the deconstruction of the unity/specificity or standardization/contextualization binary to another binary, the global/local, identifying the ramifications of unity for IS&R in a global context.

III. Establishing and reversing the binary:

Theoretical information retrieval literature

The theoretical literature of IR assumes the existence, necessity and desirability of unity. Within this literature a binary has been perceived which corresponds to the unity/specificity binary. It is the binary created by the two theoretical and research paradigms which David Ellis (1992) calls the physical and the cognitive. The physical approach, established with the Cranfield experiments, embodies the concept of unity. It is criticized for assuming that library users are a homogeneous group (with universal characteristics), that objectivity is necessary for generalizable results which should be measured quantitatively, and that there exists a static knowable truth about information and information processes (e.g., Dervin 1977; Brookes 1980; Daniels 1986; Ellis 1992 and 1992a). The physical approach employs experimental methodology and evaluative measures based on objective relevance. It adopts the Shannon—
Weaver model of communication and definition of information. The model is linear and the definition is binary.

The cognitive approach, on the other hand, professes that all users have their own mental knowledge structures which mediate their information processing. This approach advocates subjective measurements (such as user-defined relevance). It acknowledges that the effectiveness of information systems will vary according to specific users’ specific queries at specific times. However, the cognitive approach still accepts the existence, necessity and desirability of universality. Instead of universal users and universal structures it seeks universal procedures. The cognitive approach seeks a way in which all systems can adjust to all users. Even while it is acknowledging individual knowledge structures it seeks universal conceptual structures for addressing individual systems, users and queries. For example, B.C. Brookes’ fundamental equation of information science indicates a definition of information similar to the Shannon definition. Brookes views information as that which modifies one’s knowledge structure and Shannon defines it as that which decreases one’s uncertainty (Belkin 1990, 12). William Cooper’s utility theory recognizes individual and temporal differences and then averages them into a formula for a single optimal solution, “normative rules of indexing” (1978, 107). These rules are to be applied through Gedanken indexing in which the indexer envisions users’ effectiveness responses. Brookes objects to the application of statistical practices by advocates of the physical approach to the subjectivities of the cognitive approach, but retains the concept of quantification using logarithmic measurement (1980, 249–250). And the reason for Brookes’ quantification is to produce generalizable results, that is, universally applicable results (1980, 250).

So what appears to be specificity in the cognitive approach has still resulted in theory and research which aims at unity. Where, then, is the specificity implied by this unity?

What is not addressed by the physical approach and is addressed, but not dealt with, by the cognitive approach is that which is outside of the system, beyond the limit, the Other. Both the physical and the cognitive approaches assume a unity of language. The Other is that which is not comprehensible or comprehending in the language of the system. Universal comprehension and the definability of meaning and aboutness are assumed by both approaches although the physical sees them as static and the cognitive sees them as dynamic. Susan Artandi, acknowledging the problem of indexer interpretation, suggests that communication is best directly between the author and the reader because the author’s intention was the reader’s comprehension (1973, 245). In this sense, she recognizes the individual and dynamic diversity of language and meaning. John Farrow suggests that indexers (like speed readers) scanning text for aboutness gain most of their comprehension from their own knowledge structures and what they expect to see in a text, rather than from the content of the text (1991, 163). These observations indicate a recognition of the Other in this literature. They recognize that aboutness and meaning are not the same for everyone.

Who, then, is the Other? Who is outside of the system? With whom does the system need to develop an ethical relation? Who is outside is defined by the limit and the limit is defined and deferred through the concept of différence. As IS&R operates on the principle of gathering like items together it excludes from any particular group the items which are unlike. This principle (enshrined as Cutter’s Object 2 in Rules for a Dictionary Catalog) is the basis for controlled vocabularies and classifications and for the techniques of free text searching. It is an example of naming as a process of structuring reality. In the instance of Farrow’s indexer scanning text for aboutness, the indexer’s background knowledge contributes the major portion of comprehension. Therefore, information outside of what the indexer expects to read is likely to be

\[3\]\The workability of subjective measures and of user-modelling in general has been questioned (e.g. Swanson 1986; Vickery 1992) crossing the unity/specificity binary with a theory/practice binary which would be another topic for useful examination using deconstruction.

\[4\]\Further discussions of the limitations of the cognitive approach can be found in Neill 1980; Rudd 1983; Frohmann 1990 and 1992.

\[5\]\Patrick Wilson, in his comments on Cooper’s article, broadens the idea of normative rules back to the universality of the physical approach, questioning whether Cooper’s option which tries to predict specific applications of specific terms to specific documents (or act-utilitarianism) is really better than following nonpredictive rules (or rule-utilitarianism) to achieve utility in indexing (1979, 170).
outside of the limit. Indexer familiarity with a subject discipline is even more likely to reinforce the indexing of concepts within that discipline's mainstream and give less attention to innovative concepts and perspectives. Cooper's Gedanken indexing puts the indexer in the position of classifying not only the topic of a document, but also user effectiveness responses in relation to it. In anticipating user needs in this way (as all conscientious indexers are likely to do at least informally) Cooper asks the indexer to average the response, both positive and negative, to reach a value in assigning a specific term to a specific document. The relation of this value to a threshold (a limit) decides whether or not the term will be assigned. Those users whose needs are not aided by this decision are the Other.

On a more theoretical plane, the philosophy of Karl Popper, particularly his concept of 3 worlds, has been widely adopted by IS&R (Rudd 1983, 99; Neill 1982, 33). Popper's theory tries to deny the existence of the Other by positing:

the notion not only of an objective world of material things (which he calls 'World 1') and a subjective world of minds (World 2) but of a third world, a world of objective structures which are the products, not necessarily intentional, of minds or living creatures; but which, once produced, exist independently of them (Magee 1985, 59-60).

World 3 is "the whole cultural heritage ... insofar as this is encoded and preserved..." (Magee 1985, 61). By making each of his three worlds all-inclusive, Popper is denying the existence of limits. Therefore, he is denying the existence of anything outside of the limit, the Other. It is not possible to reach a relationship with the Other by denying her/his/its existence. World 3, however, does have a limit in that the cultural heritage which it encompasses must be encoded and preserved. In the case of most information the encoding involves language. Therefore, the cultural heritage of the Other must be encoded, normally in language. Going back to Cornell’s discussion of an ethical relation with the Other we know that it is naive to expect that language will be readily available for the expression of the Other’s knowledge. “We cannot escape representational schemes. Yet, at the same time, we must recognize their inevitable infidelity to radical otherness” (1992, 70). Therefore, while Popper does not express a limit he constructs a systemic limit. By adopting Popper’s three worlds, IS&R runs the risk of unintentionally excluding the Other.

Abraham Bookstein and Don R. Swanson. 1975. A decision theoretic foundation for indexing

Bookstein and Swanson’s article clearly shows a dominant interest in unity, but the limit and the Other are also implied. It includes the following expressions of unity:

1) that every concept can be expressed by a word

A user of our system expresses his information needs in the form of a request that is reduced to a single term (46). This model assumes that it is possible to think of a document as being intrinsically about a term to some degree (46).

2) that the meaning of a word is the same with each occurrence in a document or request

The development of the model begins with the observation that a reader’s apprehension of a document’s subject matter is determined by the words making up that document. In our model the process of subject recognition is assumed to be based on the statistical pattern of occurrences of words (46).

3) that it is possible to say that a document is or is not about a particular subject

This model will assume two subclasses of documents ... documents in the first class will always satisfy patrons requesting items about w, while no item in the second class would satisfy such patrons ... (46).

The mathematical techniques used in this paper have a long history. The basic problem is how to decide, on the basis of evidence, in which of two classes an object belongs (49).

These expressions taken together indicate the overall assumption that a unity of language exists, that is, that language is the same for everyone.

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6Neill suggests that Popper is “tainted with reductionism” for being unwilling to include context, that is, he wants to study the hole after having eaten the donut (1980, 376, n.).
However, in the same article I have also found the apparently contradictory expressions:

1) that different people will not find the same documents relevant for the same request

... the model recognizes, with Maron and Kuhns, that the perception of relevance is probabilistic in essence. A document that is considered relevant by one person may be rejected by another person making the identical request (46).

2) that the context of a word may contribute to its meaning

It may be argued that other words convey information to the user as well (48).

3) that the value a word carries may not be absolute, but on a continuum (here linked to how many times in occurs)

Then if a patron requests documents about \( w \), he could be presented with a list of documents ranked according to the values of \( a \) [a relationship of the probability of a document being relevant to the occurrences of a given term] associated with \( w \). For this simple model, this ranking is equivalent to ranking according to \( s \) [occurrences of the word, \( w \) in the document], and provides theoretical justification for this practice. The user can then examine documents as far down the list as he sees fit; the value of \( a \) for the last document he considers in effect estimates \( a_0 \) for that word for that user and for that request (1975, 47).

These expressions imply the assumption that meaning may be contextual in relation to documents and individuals.

The first assumption represents the dominant member of the binary opposition, unity or standardization, which is maintained in the model Bookstein and Swanson propose. The second assumption represents the subordinate member of the binary opposition, specificity or contextualization. The attempt to incorporate the latter into the model is through the idea of a continuum. "We speculate that there may be some connection between the statistical distribution of occurrences of a word, and a reader's perception of that word as indicating the content of a text" (47). However, a continuum is still basically binary in nature. It has two poles and only allows for a two-dimensional conception of a measure. This model maintains a limit; either a term represents a document's aboutness or it does not with the value of \( a_0 \) being the threshold.

To look at Bookstein and Swanson's article more closely I took them literally at their word. I decided which concepts relate to the question I am trying to pursue and set up a list of terms to represent aspects of that question. The aspects which I chose were: unity, limit and specificity. Unlike Bookstein and Swanson suggest, I added synonyms and near-synonyms. The most heavily used words were those associated with the concept of the limit. They were of two types: those that are roughly synonymous with "limit" such as "parameter," "threshold," "cut-off," and "inclusion"; and those that indicate a structure such as "model," "structure," "framework," and "classification," "class," "subclass," etc. The former are clear indications of limits drawn, the latter imply limits as the edges of systems or structures. The verbal presence of a limit in Bookstein and Swanson's article implies that something lies outside of the limit, that is, the Other.


In this article, Karen Sparck Jones identifies the unity/specificity binary and favours specificity, the Other. She observes that the usual assumption is a unity of language. "[Term specificity as characterized ... is a semantic property of index terms: a term is more or less specific as its meaning is more or less detailed and precise" (11). She develops the idea of terms being the means of establishing limits, of having "discriminating power" (12). And she suggests that not all terms have the same discriminating power. Infrequently used terms discriminate better between documents than frequently used terms. "... it seems we should treat matches on non-frequent terms as more valuable than ones on frequent terms, without

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\footnote{Specificity becomes a problematic term in this discussion. For clarity I will continue to refer to the secondary member of the binary opposition as "specificity" and will use the phrase from Sparck Jones' title, "term specificity," to refer to the specialized meaning of specificity in the context of IS&R.}
disregarding the latter altogether. The natural solution is to correlate a term's matching value with its collection frequency" (17). In this way the limit set by the terms is contextually established. The need to consider context is explained by Sparck Jones in the relationship between exhaustivity ("the exhaustivity of a document description is the number of terms it contains") and term specificity ("the specificity of a term is the number of documents to which it pertains") as inverse. As exhaustivity goes up (more terms are used per document) term specificity goes down (terms are used more often in the index) (13).

While Sparck Jones has the terms set the limit, the Other which she recognizes is defined/deferred as specific to different contexts. First, the naming of the document is "influenced by relations between terms" (12). So there is a syntactical context. Second, she acknowledges the traditional context of term weighting which is the "presumed importance of a term with respect to a document in itself" (18). Third, the context which Sparck Jones addresses most directly, the context of the term within the index as a whole.

... a particular term [if heavily used] becomes less effective as a means of retrieval, whatever its actual meaning. This is because it is not discriminating... A frequently used term thus functions in retrieval as a non-specific term, even though its meaning may be quite specific in the ordinary sense. (13)

Fourth, the context of the collection, its subject and size.

We are concerned with obtaining an effective vocabulary for a collection of documents of some broadly known subject matter and size, where a given level of indexing exhaustivity is believed to be sufficient to represent the content of individual documents adequately, and distinguish one document from another. (12)

And the fifth context of time, nearly hidden in a negative aside: "Nor are document collections static" (14).

Thus, the limit is set by relationships between words (the context of language), the context of documents, the context of the index, the context of the collection and the context of time. By proposing what is potentially a structure for a dynamic contextualized approach to indexing Sparck Jones offers one strategy for addressing the relation with the Other by valuing the Other (the relative term specificity) over the dominant.

IV. Creating an ethical relation
The examples I have explored demonstrate the existence of the dominant, the limit and the Other in the literature of IS&R. The physical paradigm makes obvious the existence of unity as the dominant member of the binary opposition. The literature of the cognitive paradigm focuses on the limit, being aware of the demands of specificity in terms of individuals, requests, documents, and vocabulary; some of it clearly stating the need for contextualization. However, while recognizing this need, the cognitive approach has not yet addressed it. How, then, to find an ethical relation as IS&R approaches the Other across the limit of informational structures?

An interesting case to consider is that of the controlled vocabulary/free text debate. In her widely respected 1986 review article on this topic, "Unanswered questions in the design of controlled vocabularies", Elaine Svenonius describes the flip-flop history of the debate and the current thinking that free text and controlled vocabulary offer different advantages to users. She stresses the need for consideration of context when considering either approach, particularly the variables of "the nature of the controlled vocabulary ... the nature of the subject disciplines ... the nature of the retrieval system ... the skill of the indexer ... the skill of the searcher ... users' retrieval requirements ..." (1986, 331). She canvasses the apparently contradictory findings of existing research and concludes with questions for further research. In this debate it is possible to consider controlled vocabulary as representing a unity of language and free text as representing specificity (here language which is specific to the document). Controlled vocabulary defines the limit of the system with its structure and finiteness. Free text offers the Other (that is, those others who get published and indexed—another issue) the ability to speak in its/her/his own language, but it does not gather to differentiate (see Cutter above).

Instead of these two approaches being polarized, practice has gone ahead without a theoretical resolution of the debate. During the 1970's databases began to add the possibility of free text searching while maintaining their controlled vocabularies (Dubois 1987, 244). The earth has not ceased to spin.
Does our experience of the controlled vocabulary/free text controversy offer clues to an ethical relation with the Other? Cornell suggests that our responsibility to the Other is infinite and unattainable because différence in its production of difference, also defers totality. So how can we “be just to information”? I believe it is by constant awareness of the Other and a constant effort to find ways to displace from the centre (to decentre) the dominant, allowing the Other to speak. I also believe that this effort has been going on in IS&R in unfelt and unacknowledged ways. In the literature I have discussed there are small openings which can be expanded to make room for the Other.

The particular example discussed in this paper is Karen Sparck Jones’ 1972 article. Her proposed model for term specificity addresses one aspect of indexing. By weighting infrequently used terms as more valuable than frequently used terms in a given index, she makes the context of the collection and index an integral part of the indexing process. She also values the terms which are most likely to represent the Other (assuming that the Other has a smaller presence in the index than the dominant which is at the centre of most documents). By using a statistical method to create a threshold she defines the limit, but instead of excluding the Other she valorizes it. In this way Sparck Jones is decentering the dominant to make room for the Other to speak. Sparck Jones is advocating a an ethically deconstructive act.

To foster an ethical relation with the Other in IS&R we must take Sparck Jones’ example and add it to a conscious awareness of the Other and of our responsibility to the Other. Then we can continue to make space by finding new and as yet unimagined strategies for practicing our ethical relation with the Other.

V. The global/local binary
In the preceding deconstruction I have addressed the unity/specificity or standardization/contextualization binary. I want to close by relating this binary to another: the global/local. I will draw on the work of four feminist poststructural theorists, Sneja Gunew, Rosemary Hennessy, Elspeth Probyn and Trinh Minh-Ha, to describe the global/local binary and will then relate it to IS&R.

The global/local binary imposes a geographical/cultural unity. To create the global, it employs what Probyn calls “location” and Hennessy calls “totalization.” For Probyn, “location” is a means of classifying and sequencing knowledge. “Through this process of siting and sequencing, location describes epistemological maneuvers whereby categories of knowledge are established and fixed into sequences” (1990, 184). This process of “location” fixes the Other outside the boundaries of knowledge. “Location” is a way of taking the dominant as universal and imposing it on the Other; “... it's just like in the movies as Canadian locals are dressed up in American location” (Probyn 1990, 183).

Hennessy describes the same process as “totalization” which “generalizes a logic of the whole from that of a particular region in order to produce a unified or total structure; it is, in this sense a mode of regionalism written large” (1993, 16). The result is what one of my students described as “exclusion by induction”: it creates a limit by taking the characteristics of a sector of a population and then generalizing them through induction to the whole population. Hence, whoever is lacking those characteristics is left outside, defined as Other (Buss 1993, 7). The global, then, is the dominant or universal.

The local is parallel to specificity or contextualization. But local should not be considered only geographical. It is both spatial and temporal in nature, and those in the broadest of terms (Probyn 1990, 178). It can include class, race, sexuality, abledness, ethnicity or any other potentially defining attributes. That is, attributes which are defined by constructed limits. However, there are pitfalls to concentration on the local. One is that Otherness can be generalized into a “pan-marginality” which introduces a new universality. It makes all Others alike in their Otherness (Gunew 1992). Or, somewhat conversely, concentration on the local can ignore interrelationships and maintain limits.

How can the global/local binary be addressed to foster an ethical relation? How do we make a space for the Other to speak? Hennessy suggests a practice of “global analysis” which “understands the social in terms of systems and structures of relations. In other words, globalization is a feature of relational thinking” (1993, 16). The concept of relational thinking and making connections is nothing new for IS&R which has been making connections at least since the Registrum Librorum Angliae, a union catalogue of 183 British monastic libraries’ holdings compiled in the thirteenth century (Norris 1969, 30-31).
Granted that we already have a tradition of making connections, how do we make space for the Other in this context? Gunew describes two kinds of multiculturalism: top down—which is manifested as policy, and bottom up—which is manifested as cultural democracy. Some efforts at the globalization of information have addressed it in both ways. IFLA's Universal Bibliographic Control and International MARC (UBCIM) programme has endorsed standards for the exchange of compatible records on an international scale. In this way, it establishes the connection between standardization and global exchange of information. At the same time, UBCIM places responsibility for creation of bibliographic records with national cataloguing agencies on the assumption that national agencies will know best how to represent the information published in their countries. In this sense, UBCIM recognizes the relevance of the local context. It is a tacit recognition that a given document could be represented differently by different cataloguing agencies. The standardization of UBCIM is built on ISBD, MARC and the Paris Principles. Its contextualization rests in the limits of national borders. Other standards for naming information follow similar lines. The development of thesaurus standards has been a complex interweaving of national and international versions which end up looking much the same. However, left out is attention to the "local" which is not geographical—the racial, gendered, class or any other Other.

We, as library and information professionals, have made an attempt at a relationship with the Other. We have made connections and we have tried to allow space for at least some Others to speak. A next step is the practice of reflexivity. Reflexivity includes analysis of our theory and practice to reveal its perspective, assessment of its impact on the Other, and development of future theory and practice informed by the insights thus gained. Trinh discusses reflexivity in relation to representation and communication:

Radically plural in its scope, reflexivity is thus not a mere question of rectifying and justifying. (Subjectivizing.) What is set in motion in its praxis are the self-generating links between different forms of reflexivity. Thus, a subject who points to him/her/itself as subject-in-process, a work that displays its own formal properties or its own constitution as work, is bound to upset one's sense of identity—the familiar distinction between the Same and the Other since the latter is no longer kept in a recognizable relation of dependence, derivation, or appropriation (Trinh 1991, 48).

Reflexivity does not, by itself, create an ethical relation with the Other. However, it is a strategy which helps us to decentre ourselves as the dominant. In naming information, reflexivity begins with the identification of the dominant and the implied Other as I have attempted to do here. We must look critically at both our theory and our practice to understand how we construct limits and to find creative ways of breaching those limits to make space for the voice of the Other. In this way we will approach an ethical relation with the Other. By questioning our assumption of unity we will be able to recognize the power we exert in constructing limits, recognize its results, and decentre or throw off balance the source(s) of power, diffusing the limits of naming information and making space for the Other to speak.

References

8This discussion of UBCIM is based on Anderson 1974; Beaudiquez 1988; Jover 1988; and Roberts 1989.
9British Standard BS 5723, American ANSI Z39.19, French AFNOR NFZ 47–100, and German DIN 1463 are national examples. Internationally, first Unesco and now the International Organization for Standardization (ISO 2788 and 5964) have produced thesaurus standards (Lancaster 1986, 30–34).


