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Charting Discovery

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Against the Grain

“Linking Publishers, Vendors and Librarians”

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Charting Discovery

by **Jesse Holden** (Head, Acquisitions, USC Libraries, University of Southern California) <jholden@usc.edu>

Discourse about and including the idea of *discovery* has become ubiquitous with the recent rise of Web-scale discovery services. So complete has this technological (not to mention lexical) revolution been that the correlation between “library” and “discovery” seems fairly obvious and natural today.

Of course, libraries have always been about discovery on one level or another. But this emerging concept moves away from previous notions of what it means to discover and, by extension, what it means to search. A curious way to mark the paradigmatic shift already underway is to look at how librarians themselves view discovery.

The 1943 *A.L.A. Glossary of Library Terms* (“Prepared under the Direction of the Committee on Library Terminology”) does not include an entry for “discovery.”¹ This omission may already seem odd, so common is the use of the term at present. It may help

to take a step back, then, and ask: What was the official definition of “library” in 1943? Answer: A library is “a collection of books and similar material organized and administered for reading, consultation, and study.”

Also, it is a “room, group of rooms, or a building” designated for said purpose. This definition conveys two things about the library: first, its inherent materiality; second, the implication that the library is (or contains) a collection of relatively *known* things. The idea of discovery in this context can only be in a very limited sense; that is, whatever information materials are available in the surrounding room(s) or building. The library was an island to be explored, perhaps, but the information within had already been discovered.



Likely it is not surprising that the 1943 *Glossary* lacks a definition of discovery. However, it is interesting to note that the contemporary *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science*, the open access resource from ABC-CLIO, also lacks a defined concept of discovery.³ The closest entry is, in fact, “discovery service,” which is defined foremost as “an interface.” Such a technological ontology for the term can be expected given that much of our conceptual development of the idea of “discovery” the past few years has been technology-driven.

Regarding the “library,” it is worth noting that the *Online Dictionary* provides rather a more nebulous definition, indicating that a library is “organized to facil-

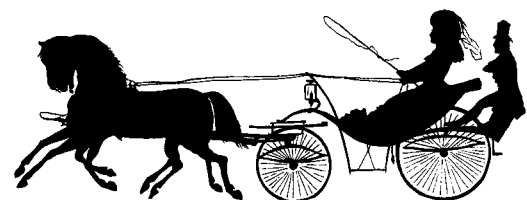
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If Rumors Were Horses

Big Drumroll!!!! Your friend and mine, **Anthony** the most outstanding **Watkinson** has been selected to receive the **ALPSP Council Contribution to Scholarly Publishing Award** this year. The Award is nominated by **ALPSP Council** and is for outstanding individuals or organizations who, as the name of the award suggests, have made a major contribution to scholarly publishing. The Award will be presented at the **ALPSP Awards Dinner** on Thursday, September 12. **Dr. Audrey McCulloch** is the Chief Executive of **ALPSP**. Huge congratulations, **Anthony!**

Was super-excited to learn that **CRL** has announced the appointment of brimming-with-energy **Christine Stamison** as the

new director of **NERL**. **Christine** succeeds **Joan Emmet**, who led **NERL** since 2011. In her new capacity, **Christine** will negotiate pricing and terms of use for the hundreds of databases and e-journal and eBook packages licensed or purchased on behalf of **NERL**'s 28 members and 80 affiliates, and will work with the **NERL** Board, Program Council, and **CRL** to increase these libraries' return on their investment in electronic resources. The appointment is effective September 3. **Christine** has considerable experience in the electronic publishing and the information marketplace. With over thirty years in the private and public sectors, working for both subscription vendors and academic libraries, she brings extensive knowledge of the information industry and a valuable set of skills to the **NERL** program. She has worked in technical services and periodicals at the **University of Illinois at Chicago**, and also directed the **Serials Orders Section** at the **University of Chicago**,



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itate access” and that its user needs are met by “trained personnel.” This is a marked change from the overt materiality of the library of 70 years ago; the present-day library has come to include connections as well as collections, and service as well as a physical, administered space. But even now, the idea of “discovery” is not always integral to the definition of the library.

However, it is undeniable that our emerging concept (or concepts) of discovery are becoming more complex and nuanced as the information landscape becomes more difficult and confusing to navigate. The very idea of discovery is becoming inextricably tied to the library. And though this idea certainly carries the connotations of technological development and expanding access to content, it also provides a new framework in which to refine (or even *redefine*) library collection and service models.

As the featured selections in this issue

demonstrate, the concept of discovery goes beyond a simple interface, advanced search algorithms, and electronic content. Several of the contributors take the conceptual aspects of discovery to the next level. **Scott R. Anderson** uses analogues from everyday life to illustrate the valuable potential of mental models in the development of discovery services. **Sam Brooks** looks at the potential of discovery services to enhance and enrich the end user experience. **Eddie Neuwirth** and **Gillian Harrison Cain** make a compelling case that discovery creates the possibility to increase the scale of library services while simultaneously promoting the value of those services. Meanwhile, **Virginia Bacon** and **Ginny Boyer** trace the implementation and evolution of a discovery service at **East Carolina University**, providing a case study for the adoption of (and adaptation to) discovery in a way that impacts the whole library.

Exemplified by these collected articles is the fact that discovery may be approached from many perspectives. Though some ideas and manifestations overlap, it is clear that those within the information ecosystem

are all exploring the concepts and developments of “discovery” along many different paths. 🐭

Endnotes

1. **Elizabeth H. Thompson.** *A.L.A. Glossary of Library Terms*. Chicago: **American Library Association**, 1943.

(Interestingly, the verso of the *Glossary* title page features the following notice:

“WAR FORMAT: Any departures from usual A.L.A. style and standards of format in this book are the result of the war. Conservation of materials and labor through the use of lighter weight paper and smaller type contributes to the thinness of this book. Shifting personnel attributable to wartime conditions may also have resulted in inconsistencies of style and even in some typographical errors.”)

2. **Joan M. Reitz.** *Online Dictionary for Library and Information Science (ODLIS)*. **ABC-CLIO**, [2013]. Available at: http://www.abc-clio.com/ODLIS/odlis_A.aspx.

Discovery and Mental Models

by **Scott R. Anderson** (Associate Professor, Information Systems Librarian, Millersville University, Millersville, PA)
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The concept of a discovery service should simplify the library in virtual spaces. This simplification isn’t intended to convey that discovery services are always easier or better — sometimes yes, sometimes no. But what it does do is provide libraries an *opportunity* to align content, collections, and services into a reasonably consistent mental model for users. The first layer of this consistency is increasingly manifest as a search box.¹

Users already possess and use in everyday life a multitude of mental models for a variety of tasks (shopping, ordering food, pumping gas, etc.) Let us be clear, this idea of a mental model isn’t just about searching the library. Nor am I going to proffer that a discovery service or a discovery layer is perfect in all cases. But what such a model *does* provide is a relatively logical starting point for “the library” as a mental model and what to expect in many cases regardless of where or how they encounter “the library” and its collections and services. That encounter could take place at the library Website, a search widget embedded in some other space such as a university portal or social media platform, within a learning management system, perhaps a browser plugin, stand-alone mobile app, etc. To the extent that functionality can be effectively inserted into *other* spaces, the library will need to be mindful of how it positions collections and services *within* the results of that initial search environment and not just prior it.

Let us explore a brief shopping example. How difficult would it be to buy groceries or navigate a “big box” merchandise store if each

and every time you visited a different store you have to determine the general layout of the store? With each visit you have to determine where various sections are located in either absolute terms and/or if sections are logically located relative to each other. While not the Twilight Zone, this unique shopping experience each time you entered a different but similar kind of store would become rather laborious, tedious, and time consuming.

There is a rationale behind the layout and collocation of merchandise in like types of retail establishments as the experience is strikingly *similar* from store to store, experience to experience, and location to location. By following a similar approach to location and layout, if not look and feel, it significantly reduces the amount of mental energy it takes to find the *general area or service*, which you are trying to locate — even if you don’t know exactly what you were trying to find.

If you enter the “front” of a general merchandise store (think **Target**, **Wal-Mart**, **K-Mart**, etc.), it’s typically arranged left to right: hard goods (sporting goods, tools, light bulbs, TV’s, etc.), soft goods (clothing, towels, seasonal attire, shoes, etc.), and groceries; and if it’s not that, then it’s probably reversed but still with retail food and the pharmacy “in or

near the front” of the main entrance of the store. If you enter from some other point (e.g., garden, automotive, or seasonal), the store might seem “backwards” or perhaps inverted but the *relative positioning* of these various categories is generally the same once you have oriented yourself to your in-store surroundings. In stores that seem unfamiliar or confusing, the layout probably doesn’t follow the mental model that most of us have learned through experience to facilitate navigation in these kinds of spaces.

The point is that regardless of *exactly* how the store is arranged, you can get a general sense of where you are because previous experience drives the idea that “bed and bath” (soft goods) is probably going to be close to “kitchen” (also soft-ish goods) and both will be relatively far from “automotive” or “sporting goods” (both hard goods). Items like paint or plastics (hangers, containers) are typically “on the edge” of a section because they’re not strictly hard or soft goods, but somewhere in between the two (like gray literature). Or these items on the edge work in conjunction *with* a hard or soft good, so you’ll have to look a bit harder for them.

And this relates to libraries how? It relates to the rise of the search box as the primary point of entry to library content and services.² It’s an opportunity to position or embed collections

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