

Foucault and the Bibliographic Universe: What *Really* Is an Author?

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ABSTRACT

This poster will present connections that are readily apparent between Michel Foucault's concept of "author" and the "entities" in FRBR. Both Group 1 and Group 2 FRBR Entities have properties that are analogous to Foucault's ideas of authors and the works they produce. Moreover, Foucault addresses important matters concerning the apprehension of the works and how authors (or, as he phrases it, the "author-function") are perceived, both directly and as broader notions. FRBR and the entity attributes designated in FRAD have the potential to realize some of the extension of "work" and "author" introduced by Foucault. This poster will include this possible extension.

Keywords

FRBR, FRAD, Foucault, Michel, bibliographic universe, authority data, authors, author-function

INTRODUCTION

The "Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records" (FRBR) Final Report was issued by the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) in 1997. The Report was drafted, in part, to accomplish a particular goal:

The purpose of this study is to delineate in clearly defined terms the functions performed by the bibliographic record with respect to various media, various applications, and various user needs. The study is to cover the full range of functions for the

bibliographic record in its widest sense—i.e., a record that encompasses not only descriptive elements, but access points (name, title, subject, etc.), and other "organizing" elements (classification, etc.), and annotations (p. 2).

The bibliographic record and what might be demanded of it had changed over the years, and FRBR was, and is, a concerted effort to understand emerging demands. The Study Group that wrote the Report explicitly made no assumptions about the bibliographic record and its purposes, and took a user-focused approach to its analysis of requirements. The Report details conceptual and practical considerations related to bibliographic description.

Years before the FRBR Final Report appeared Michel Foucault (1977) wrote an essay entitled, "What Is an Author?" One rather superficial similarity between FRBR and Foucault's essay is the initial questioning of past definitions and ideas, and their relevance to a world in which roles and functions have changed. A deeper similarity (that will not be fully explored in this poster) is the semiotic alteration of both the record and the author that is, in fact, freedom from interior boundaries: "This reversal transforms writing [and the bibliographic record] into an interplay of signs, regulated less by the content it signifies than by the very nature of the signifier" (p. 116). More to the point, the poster will concentrate on a set of questions that Foucault himself asks: "What, in short, is the strange unit designated by the term, work? What is necessary to its composition, if a work is not something written by a person called an 'author'?" (p. 118). These questions could have been asked by the IFLA Study Group.

FOUCAULT AND FRBR

An objective of FRBR is to provide a structure for records that is at once clear and discrete and also open to the vagaries of actual communicative creations. In order to accomplish the objective, two groups of entities of immediate interest to the present discussion are identified, the Group 1 Entities with the intention of representing aspects of user interests in the bibliographic universe and

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ASIST 2012, October 28-31, 2012, Baltimore, MD, USA.
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Group 2 Entities with the intention of depicting responsibility relationships (pp. 13-14). Group 1 entities exist in an almost (but not quite) hierarchical relationship that flows from “work” which is realized through the “expression” embodied in a “manifestation” exemplified by an “item.” As is evident, and as is stated in the Report, the “work” is an abstract entity; it is not extant in a material object. One could even say that a user might be only partly conscious of a work (“I understand that there is something known as *Huckleberry Finn*, but my understanding extends no further than that.”) The “expression” is apparent each time the work is realized; the words, notes, sounds, etc. can be known, but can vary from expression to expression. Leonard Bernstein’s interpretation of Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 is different from James Levine’s. The “manifestation” becomes even more concrete; a recording of Bernstein conducting Mahler’s Symphony No. 3 is a different embodiment from a recording of Levine conducting the symphony. An “item” is explicitly concrete; the University of Missouri Library owns a compact disc of Levine conducting the Philadelphia Orchestra performing Mahler’s Symphony No. 3.

Foucault recognizes the inherent challenges to designating entities in such a way. His question regarding a work implies that is something that has indeed been created, but can be one that is difficult to categorize. Once a categorical decision is made, other material (ontological?) matters become a bit clearer. Those material matters have some analogues to the FRBR designations:

Group 1 Entities and Primary Relationships

<u>FRBR</u>		<u>Foucault</u>
Work	---	Discourse
Expression	---	Discursive expression
Manifestation	---	Circulation
Item	---	Control

Group 2 Entities: Person, Corporate Body

<u>FRBR</u>		<u>Foucault</u>
Created by	---	Author
Realized by	---	Author-function

For Foucault the author-function is more than the signification of a proper name, such as Shakespeare. The works that bear the name Shakespeare are characterized by particular qualities and carry recognition by people who may not have read any of the works. As Foucault (1977) says, the author-function “results from a complex operation whose purpose is to construct the rational entity we call an author” (p. 127). It is the realization, in the language of FRBR, that serves to move the construction forward. The realization is something more (or at least different) than the creation according to both FRBR and Foucault. The Group 2 entities of FRBR are intended to assist users in their navigation through the bibliographic universe (Tillett, 2004,

p. 3).

Foucault’s conception is considerably more expansive than FRBR’s. The principle reason for the breadth of his scheme is his borrowing from Saint Jerome’s criteria for the determination of authorship. Within the framework of Saint Jerome the author is the provider of uniformity, consistency, identifiability, and resolution of contradiction in works. Foucault’s appropriation of Saint Jerome is vital to his idea of the work and author as a complex unity. Complexity is insinuated into the relationship by means of the discursive practice of writing, in which multiple egos can be found. The multiplicity of egos is most readily evident in fiction, but it can be found in scientific works as well. Foucault maintains that the ego responsible for expressing, say, a setting in the review of literature is not the same as the one apparent in the expression of data (which can be different from the ego expressing a conclusion).

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN FOUCAULT AND FRBR

It can be seen that there are some similarities between Foucault and FRBR, although there are some notable differences. The FRBR structure is intended to provide a systemic reciprocal and relational connection, both within and among works. An example of the extension of FRBR’s relational structure can be found on page 16 of the Report. The graphic presents Group 3 Entities, which introduces subject relationships. These relationships can be quite complex, but the demonstrated connections may be oversimplified. A work can have other works, expressions, etc. as subjects, can have persons or corporate bodies as subjects, or can have concepts, objects, events, or places as subjects. The relationships bear some resemblance to Foucault’s concept of extension, but they do not capture potential subtleties and/or interstitial connections.

Since the creation of FRBR, another more specific and focused effort at explicating elements of authority data was undertaken by the IFLA Working Group on Functional Requirements and Numbering of Authority Records (FRNAR). Their report, Functional Requirements for Authority Data (FRAD), specifically addresses the Group 2 entities of FRBR, enumerating the attributes of persons, families, and corporate bodies that should be present in authority data. FRAD identifies four user tasks (users being both information professionals and end-users) that should be accomplished through the available authority data: contextualize, find, identify, and justify. These user tasks are formalized in the FRAD document and are listed in the Open Metadata Registry (FRAD User Tasks, 2012). The user task “Contextualize” is defined as:

Plac[ing] a person, corporate body, work, etc., in context; clarify[ing] the relationship between two or

more persons, corporate bodies, works, etc.; or clarify[ing] the relationship between a person, corporate body, etc., and a name by which that person, corporate body, etc., is known (e.g., name used in religion versus secular name).

Further development of authority records based on FRBR/FRAD conceptual models will benefit, as the poster will illustrate, from attention to Foucault's understanding of the complexity of the author-function in the broader context of the bibliographic record.

A particular example of Foucault's expansion of the author-function can be illustrated by using Sigmund Freud. Freud, of course, was an author of definable and attributable works. The discourse surrounding Freud, though, extends beyond the person or the proper name. Freud gave birth (intentionally or not) to Freudianism, or discursive practice that draws in some ways from his works. He also gave birth to psychoanalysis, a school of psychiatric and psychological practice. Psychoanalysts might or might not be Freudians, but they all draw in some ways from Freud and his works. Particular individuals are also connected to Freud; Otto Rank would be one such person. There are also individuals that have complex connections to Freud, such as Carl Jung. Jung and Freud are also responsible for works on dreams, but Jung departed from Freud's orthodoxy. Freud has further given rise to those who have reacted against his works and expressions including Betty Friedan. As Foucault (1977) remarks, authors who can be seen as embodying author-functions, such as Freud and Marx, are "initiators of discursive practices," [who] not only made possible a certain number of analogies that could be adopted by future texts, but, as importantly, they also made possible a certain number of differences" (p. 132). The multiplicity of author-functional relationships will be illustrated graphically in the poster.

Finally, the poster explores a key question: Can such tools as FRBR and FRAD be interpreted and employed in terms of Foucault's further ideas, or (perhaps more importantly) can they be expanded to embrace Foucault's ideas? An essential component in Foucault's (1977) contemplation of "author" is his re-envisioning of an author-function, which holds that

an author's name is not simply an element of speech (as a subject, a complement, or an element that could be replaced by a pronoun or other parts of speech). Its presence is functional in that it serves as a means of *classification*. A name can group together a number of texts [or works] and thus differentiate them from others. . . . We can conclude that, unlike a proper name, which moves from the interior of a discourse to the real person outside who produced it, the name of an author remains at the contours of texts—separating

one from the other, defining their form, and characterizing their mode of existence [emphasis added] (p. 123).

The FRBR/FRAD models successfully incorporate the attributes that distinguish one person from another and one work from another, per the user task *Contextualize*. Works are created by persons (or corporate bodies) in the FRBR model; persons create, yet, in doing so, the person becomes an author. In the bibliographic universe, can we truly say that attributes of a person provide a sufficient indication of the author-function as described by Foucault?

CONCLUSION

The bibliographic universe is not a vacuum, however, and Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 entities all work together in bibliographic records and the systems that house them to give a robust explanation of a work in context. Attributes of a person demonstrate *some* of the author-functions outlined by Foucault, specifically those related to the historical figure that the author represents; derivative relationships between works show additional relationships between the author of one work and authors of related works (by time period, by country of origin, etc.) or between works of different authors (topically, by genre); lastly, Group 3 entities convey information about doctrines and approaches; these are included as attributes for works according to the FRAD model and are included as subjects in bibliographic records. Only the quality of writing and the stylistic uniformity between and among an author's works, attributes attributed to the author that are ascertained through a study of the work(s), are left out of the FRBR model entirely.

The bibliographic universe and description are re-envisioned by the likes of FRBR and FRAD, with an eye to discriminating among complex attributes. That said, the description tools are deterministic sets of rules that are intended to provide for practical support of cataloging and organizational tasks. As such, there are individuations among, for example, Group 1, Group 2, and Group 3 entities. Foucault suggests that there is actually a unity that can be captured within the author-function. This poster asks a fundamental questions: Would information organization benefit by adopting a shift to a more Foucauldian consciousness and the unity it represents? Can the bibliographic universe be practically conceived as a unity?

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