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TITLE: Non-fiction: An Unnaturally Naturalised Concept

for Collection Development (Part 1)

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper seeks to problematise the basis of our use of non-fiction as an explanatory category in libraries that have mandates to deliver information to civil society users in order to initiate debate on its ongoing value.

Design/methodology/approach: A range of literature from the fields of information science, philosophy, literary studies and the sociology of knowledge was critically surveyed in order to uncover reasons for the use of the non-fiction concept when librarians are dealing with documentary knowledge. A process of thematisation of relevant material was then conducted utilising a methodology informed by historicist and hermeneutic- phenomenological approaches to social scientific inquiry.

Findings: While the concept of non-fiction has arguably been the single most influential "gift" of librarianship to other disciplines and to readers, the term's extreme simplicity masks a complex range of factors associated with common-sense understanding of life and our conceptualisation of what constitutes knowledge in civil society information environments. By masking the nature of questions associated with knowledge and documentary knowledge the non-fiction concept contributes to a restricted view of how these concepts interrelate.

Practical implications: Preliminary reasons are offered for why the non-fiction concept is problematic and an alternative discursive formation is put forward which may enable more fruitful caretaking of documentary collections in school and public libraries.

Originality/value: This paper helps to open the discussion among collection management theorists and practitioners regarding how the concept of documentary knowledge can be more usefully theorised so that it is better able to support the epistemic learning and socialisation goals of libraries characterised by their civil society setting.

PART 1

Within the world of ideas that school and public library selectors are called upon to represent to their readers the contingency which operates to separate fiction from what has some physical manifestation, albeit as a real or intentional object, has an uncertain and largely undefined status as "non-fiction." Why reality, as either a physical object or process or, as a product of human thought—as metaphysical, ethical or historical speculation—is, or should be, defined with reference to novels in libraries, and by extension within general literary discursive frameworks, is largely undefined. An attempt is made here to highlight why this is problematic and how knowledge is arrested in its development as a result of a choice by civil society's librarians to represent knowledge as a nebulous concept, either incalculable beyond mere classification, or inestimable, given the limits of the typical librarian's scientific and humanistic training.

By choosing to avoid an engagement with the concept of knowledge librarians in non-academic settings work within a poorly framed set of epistemic reference points. This construction is that knowledge is an entity that cannot be named for fear of either, committing the error of overreach or, conversely, of underestimation. The exploration of the non-fiction concept which follows is informed by Bowker and Star's view that classification systems are "historical and political artefacts," that categories emerge from "organised activity" and that, inevitably, conflicts over meaning occur over classification (1999, p. 285). Non-fiction is conceived here as a "large scale information system" which is "used to communicate across contexts" (286) and as a *boundary infrastructure*. This involves seeing these systemic and contextual factors as "working arrangements that resolve anomalies of naturalisation without imposing a naturalisation of categories from one community or from an outside source of standardisation" (297).

Approaching non-fiction as a boundary infrastructure helps us to more skilfully formulate alternative constructions to our representation of knowledge/documentary-knowledge which can be then offered as a reasonable alternative to the non-fiction concept, which is identified here as highly problematic. Possibly the most important part of the boundary infrastructure idea is how it relies on a well-formed explication of how categories and objects become *naturalised* as members of a community of practice become increasingly familiar with the category or with the object in question. We have to actively work at naturalising categories (such as non-fiction) in the course of our becoming competent library users and this work is, in fact, a very ordinary activity that, over decades, has somehow escaped critical interrogation. Just as we must work hard at naturalising knowledge as non-fiction and making this seem ordinary, it is argued here, that this process also serves to define anyone who does not understand the concept as uninitiated into the competent library users' community of practice (294-295). The argument made here is that the non-fiction concept shows many of the tendencies of Bowker and Star's boundary infrastructure and that it does so imperfectly and with deleterious consequences.

On Difference and Ordinary Life

The differences that define what we understand fiction and "non-fiction" works to be have been fairly extensively discussed within literature studies as treatments of textuality but the focus on intellectual history, such as that made by LaCapra (1983), introduced a more nuanced understanding of the categorial differences between fiction and documentary writing. LaCapra discusses the notion of documentary and "worklike" writing, which he traces to Heidegger's (1975) discussion of the work of art (rather than the sense that writing fiction is a journeyman activity). He also links the notion to J. L. Austin's "distinction between the 'constative'—the descriptive statement that is measured against the criteria of truth and

falsehood in 'corresponding' to facts—and the 'performative'—the doing of things with words that bring about a change in the situational context" (LaCapra, 1983, 30*n*). Documentary work, according to LaCapra "marks a difference" while worklike fiction "makes a difference" (30). The differences between document and work are marked but an element of complementarity remains when looked at with a critical and historical eye. What is of interest in this unpacking of the unsaid (in our informational dealings with the representation of knowledge as non-fiction) is the relation of a document that makes "it a text of a certain sort with its own historicity and...relations to socio-political processes" with how these considerations may be "filtered out when...used purely and simply as a quarry for facts" (31). While LaCapra is focusing on the situation with individual documents, the inquiry undertaken here looks at the broader collective effect of what we miss, what gets lost when we represent documentary knowledge as a "quarry for facts," when we represent knowledge as not "a work of art."

In *Knowledge and Human Interests* (1971) Habermas advances the view that axiological considerations, such as standards (we have a standard division of the public library into fiction and non-fiction), are formed from attitudes which, in turn, derive from arguments that are a necessity when we are unable to logically deduce, or empirically demonstrate, what is a right choice. As methodological decision, such arguments will either be "appropriate or inappropriate" to resolve the problem under consideration. While it is acknowledged that the choice of dividing a public library collection into fiction and non-fiction may have been appropriate at one time, deriving from the "necessity of interests" that can, to paraphrase Habermas, "neither be prescribed nor represented"—we *can* "come to terms" with these interests and the effect that it has had on how knowledge is represented (Habermas, 312). The intention here is to come to terms with the division, and the nomenclature, and how we might better conceptualise knowledge in libraries serving civil society's users.

In trying to say what non-fiction is, what knowledge is, or better, what the knowledge is that is typically represented in public libraries, we can approach the task in a number of ways. LaCapra's treatment of Sartre as a person with an "ordinary" life and as a literary case study, if you will, is an illuminating place to start. As is well known, Sartre's early fame was as a novelist and he retained an interest in literary matters even after his philosophical interests and political commitments eclipsed them. By looking at non-fiction as biographical in nature we capture something of the difference that imaginative works carve out from this ordinary-life setting. Whether the non-fiction work focuses on physics or gardening, the work emerges from biographically informed aspects of the author's life. The author's ordinary life, regardless of the potential for extraordinary intellectual or physical or altruistic acts to be represented in their work, encompasses in some way the reason for the creation of the work. Fiction need have no such connection. It often does, but it need not. One must at least have mastered list-making to author a book that lists divergent events or facts that one knows nothing about. Mastering list-making requires that there is at least a cursory knowledge of contexts within which an event, or fact, can be categorised in a list.

In delineating a textual space for ordinary life to occupy is to fashion an acknowledgment that we should recognise "interaction between lived and written texts" and that "written texts are important events in a life" (LaCapra, 1983, p. 185). By removing the "simple identification...[and] simple dichotomy between the discursive events that are written texts and 'real-life' events that are always related to discourse" we move beyond "merely comparing raw data with discursive or narrative representation" toward "comparing signifying practices which pose the problem of mutual translatability and transformation" (185).

Difficulties Representing Knowledge and Ordinary Life

So, while it is in a way a commonplace to advance the view that non-fiction/knowledge is related to human life, to the living of human life, it is necessary to preface this as formative in the general inability to characterise the representation of what these types of knowledges actually are. To say that they are non-fiction is simply to say that there is little that could be said in a descriptive phrase that was not ineluctably inadequate. But what of the alternative, *knowledge*? It would seem that modest librarians who were aware of the great libraries of the world, when the non-fiction phrase emerged as a term of public library collection development in the early twentieth-century, could not bring themselves to compare their small collections of knowledge to collections which had no need to define the sum total of knowledge categories. More pressing tasks of classification and information retrieval were at hand for national and academic libraries.

The problem has not been addressed and generations of children have passed through the public library system with knowledge represented as a vast, classified, retrievable amorphous concept. At times it might have been conceived of in terms of smaller chunks, identifiable with disciplinary knowledge, as either science or history or humanities, but all of this in the final summation, was essentially seen as *not* imaginative fiction. This non-fiction was not the main reason people came to the library. It was not the mirror of ordinary life (that which mattered most). Fiction reading was the satisfying, normative use of a public library. Growth in fiction reading paralleled the growth of public education (with the growth in public libraries not far behind). While it took a number of decades, popular fiction finally took over the public library, the demand of tax-paying (and voting) fiction readers for a service to meet their needs finally winning any battle with purist librarians fighting a rear-guard action and

seeking to shape collections based on notions of taste or refinement (or even moral considerations).

What Knowledge and Whose Knowledge Should Be Represented?

LaCapra's discussion of Sartre's *Search for a Method* is helpful in trying to get to where the non-fiction concept (knowledge) might be had it not found itself profoundly confused. Confused by its relationship with the craze for imaginative fiction but more so, confused by its inability to define itself for a newly literate population, urbanising and becoming enfranchised and wanting access to books and information. The questions of "what knowledge" and "what boundaries are there to knowledge" would regularly lead to an impasse, one associated with the social divisions that demarcated university education. Public library users who graduated to a university education would see these questions (largely) fall away in libraries devoted to scientific and humanistic inquiry, while the vast majority of public library users would be left with a view of knowledge as a difficult maze (based on the notion that if it is unnameable it must be either unfathomable or unnavigable). The subtle message that enquiring after knowledge, or trying to conceptualise its limits, was better left to experts would be made more credible as science's scale and specialisation grew in the same period as did the non-fiction concept (1900-1950). LaCapra points to how Sartre advances the view that "life is informed by a totalising intentionality that is experienced and comprehended without being conceptually known" (1983, p. 186) and this is part of the problem that we face in giving a form of credibility to the non-fiction entity.

We know that what is meant when the librarian speaks of non-fiction (the concept originates as a librarian's term of art and not as an epistemological concept) that they are giving form to life in all of its (documentary) manifestations. Unfortunately, this is done in such a way

that does not permit such a formation to be properly resolvable dialectically. The question of how the final importance of science or ethics could be argued in a public library, with limited resources, run by staff with limited training, was obviously as much of a moot point a century ago as it is today. What meaning would it have? To call a non-fiction collection Science would be to grossly misrepresent the vast bulk of the average public library collection just as to call a collection Knowledge would be to inject a subjectivist and relativist tone to what is included under such a heading. The choice of either would allow an all-too-easy referencing of meaning across topics or flatten significant knowledge into the same category as insignificant knowledge. Many of the aporias of philosophy can be seen to be well and truly at home in this conundrum. No wonder it was artfully avoided by librarians; any choice would seemingly have been a leap of desperation. But this is not to acknowledge that no sin is committed against Science or Knowledge (or their combinations) by perpetuating the non-fiction fallacy. It will be argued here that public librarians have an obligation to make manifest what is currently avoided by this term of art and to engage with the problem on grounds that are understandable to their library's users.

Dealing with Totalisation through a Renewal of Reference and Scrutabilty

Non-fiction as a term of art acts to totalise the problem of knowledge through creating an unnecessary opposition "in which 'literary' currents confront 'philosophical' theses" (LaCapra, 1983, p. 187). We might, more profitably, find guidance in focusing on "the unifying and decentring forces and not to the submergence of life and thought in sheer flux" (187) which is what, at a stretch, occurs in such an uncontextualised term as non-fiction. Unifying forces would of course include, inter alia, science, humanistic knowledge, hobbies, biography, art, government and engineering. Decentring forces could be construed as looking at what makes a culture of literary consumption the main role of a public library; it could be that we look at

what an integrated collection would mean (fiction having a legitimate place as a literary narrative art form, not a specialised commodified object of mass-market capitalism). These are, to some extent, digressions from the main argument to be developed here.

Within the Sartrean-phenomenological construction that LaCapra works on, prose and poetry are treated as types of eidetic *essence*. LaCapra posits that there is a "decisive analytic opposition between them" that reveals how they are in their language use different, prose being "referential and instrumental." Of course, fiction plays with prose as much as non-fiction plays with poetry (in this we should look to Feyerabend, Knorr-Cetina and Longino for support before even touching upon analytic philosophy of language) but these distinctions are usually only revealed to expert readers and play no part in the public library reader's explicit knowledge of their non-fiction world. This inter-relation hovers, in a sense, just above where librarians construct their generalised knowledge base. Sartre's treatment of prose and poetry as eidetic essences and ideal types are constructed, according to LaCapra, with reference to a "decisive analytic opposition between them" and they are, as prose, best understood as "referential and instrumental" knowledge (LaCapra, 210)—obviously not replacement terms for non-fiction but certainly available for guidance in creating an alternative nomenclature.

Our exemplar, Sartre, able to move easily between fiction and documentary writing, makes the point that we are dealing with "complex structures, impure, but well-defined" (Sartre, 1949, 37) when we try to understand the reason behind why people write, why they invest time into "the total enterprise of living that each one of us is" (35). Sartre points to how "the literal writer uses language to transmit information" while "the literary writer is the custodian of ordinary language...[their] material is language as nonsignifying or as misinformation" (272) and this sense of understanding non-fiction as a different type of

language use, in the sense of its transmissive character is a way-point to helping to navigate the kind of information and topicality that we wish to include and why we want to include it in a documentary knowledge collection.

LaCapra points to this Sartrean separation of genre, not genre in our usual narrow definition of Thrillers and True Crime but more fundamental, of literature and philosophy. While literary writing acts as the custodian of ordinary language, within the strict genre division referred to above, philosophy (used as a synecdoche for documentary knowledge) has the "regal position as master of language" for Sartre (LaCapra, 217); it is "the rigorously technical realm of univocal usage...of pure conceptual communication" (218). In a sense, this univocality helps us to understand the level at which language defines the topicality included in documentary knowledge. Literary language, by way of contrast, engages in a multivocality that is generally absent from documentary knowledge. It is worth noting though that LaCapra is not entirely convinced that Sartre's separation can be as clearly warranted; he thinks that "he takes for granted the conventional assumption that maximal univocity makes for better philosophy than does usage in which unifying controls are contested or even at times carnivalised by other more ambivalent or multivocal tendencies" (218).

Sartre's notion of lived experience (*le vécu*)—"the ensemble of the dialectical process of psychic life, in so far as this process is obscure to itself because it is a constant totalisation"— gives us another way-point in our search for a firm underpinning for a revised conception of documentary knowledge in the public library (Sartre, 1976, p. 41). This notion of constant totalisation "cannot be conscious of what it is" and Sartre explains its implicature by saying that while we can be "conscious of an external totalisation" we cannot be "conscious of a totalisation which also totalises consciousness" (41). It is here that we might comprehend how

Sartre's concepts of lived experience and totalisation inform an understanding of how we formulate what documentary knowledge should represent in the public library. We should define totalisation, for clarity. A totalisation is an act of making diverse phenomenon seem, reasonably, to be a single entity. It is what occurs in the act of naming "non-fiction." Sartre makes the point that while lived experience is always comprehendible, knowledge of lived experience is less-easily defined. This is the equivalent of saying that "one can know certain psychic phenomena by concepts, but not this experience itself" (41) which is in a sense "unsayable." By analogy, non-fiction is all that qualifies as "unsayable lived experience"—that in its naming—is a totalisation. It is unsayable in ordinary language for it would be just about impossible to be accurate in what is said or to philosophically master the language in a way that is needed to adequately explicate the subject matter. This should not, however, be a barrier to attempting to bring thought to bear on how the conundrum can be solved. In what follows an attempt is made to provide some greater explanatory insight into how the concept can be reinvigorated and how by extension, reading culture and scientific and humanistic literacies can be improved.

Indeterminacy, Truth and Worldview

How do we see the disembodied knowledge that the non-fiction concept claims to represent? What we have in non-fiction is a signification both disembodied (it says nothing of what it is only what is not) and free-floating (it is never possible to say what non-fiction is about without engaging in an act of radical indeterminacy). Medina points to how "radical indeterminacy occurs when we look at language from the detached position of an observer or theoretician who abstracts from particular contexts to codify information" (2005, p. 94). Wittgenstein's, language game theory takes a bit of the shine off this Quinean concept for it cannot apply between competent members of a language-using group, of participants-in-

practice where "meaning becomes determinate in particular contexts of action" (Medina, 94). When we use the word non-fiction among ourselves, as librarians, we experience little in the way of indeterminacy but when we use it to describe knowledge held in a public library to public library users we risk the possibility of a conceptual meltdown. Quine's notion of the inscrutability of reference combines a scepticism that (i) our true understanding of how others use rudimentary language units (words) is possible with the notion that (ii) other persons' ontological commitments (to the meaning of a particular word) are similarly unclear. Hookaway claims that this view leads to an "impoverished, highly naturalistic vocabulary for describing and explaining human practices, including the search for knowledge" (1988, p. 144). Quine's notion of reification, that is as a means by which we can superimpose "firm connections upon the looseness of truth functions" (2008, p. 140), has some validity in this context when we note the concept of non-fiction as an example of an attempt reify the knowledge/science concept, albeit in a very flawed way.

Perhaps one of the difficulties in finding a better description of documentary knowledge than non-fiction is the fact that not only do we include science, humanities and belles-lettres there, we include in most public libraries the seemingly trivial things that make up lived experience. Few would find this objectionable, and quite rightly so. Quine and Ullian remind us that far from "soberly seeking to learn is all there should be" (1978, p. 5) fun and games are part of a healthy and balanced existence. There is a qualifier though that they provide, and while they are speaking on a generalised level about science it is applicable to collections as well. It *should be rational*. Or, at the very least, it should not promote anti-rationalism. They advance the view that it is a form of responsible belief that the ordinary lay-person, the citizen reader, should pursue. Not everything in documentary knowledge is rolled-gold truth but largely it will be the product of responsible belief. Few collections have ever been built on an

anti-rational basis and from this we might reasonably deduce that there are normative epistemological criteria for what we mean by documentary knowledge (or non-fiction).

Lashchyk makes the substantive claim, of note to collection managers in public libraries, that models of the world—as are developed by sociologists and philosophers primarily, but also by historians and natural scientists—are able to serve as "a heuristic for the literary writer" (1986, p. 175) as well. Such a model (call it an ideology or a *Weltanschauung*) may encapsulate humanity, nature, indeed all existence and even a telos. Regardless of what it ends up containing it allows "perspective or...interpretation" to form. Within the context of the defective non-fiction concept, Lashchyk's questioning is pertinent. While his critique looks at literary authors in a broadly scientific context, of how epistemology is unable to accommodate creativity or discovery, he focuses on how the problems of the "infinity of possibilities" that press against the *littérateur* are similar to the same issues that demand attention from the public library selector. Models of the world—of what non-fiction/documentary knowledge should be in the public library—are required, as combinatory means through which we can accommodate the creative and imaginative impetus. We should find no problem in defining a non-fiction/documentary knowledge collection that imitates another collection of significant value as it is not only a literary norm to engage in such action but it is scientific, through and through; such exemplars are heuristic guides, or in the words of Lashchyk, with slightly little difference in focus, "paragons of science on the analogy with moral paragons of virtue" (176). For Lashchyk, creation is not *ex nihilo* in literature; it emerges from chaos but does not emerge from nothing. In the same vein, non-fiction's domain structure while potentially all-encapsulating has many traditions from which to draw and so while it could come from anywhere, it does not. It comes from one's cultural environment and even one's mood; it

expresses some message and "creates some metaphor." There are constraints that determine literary creations in much the same sense as they determine scientific ones (176).

The History (and Poetry) of Experience

Librarians often refuse to tackle the documentary knowledge issue head-on. As history looms large in the set of domains that form this literature, and its appreciation is an aesthetic as much as factual pursuit, it is reasonable to ask "if history is often art, what kind of art is it?" (Gay, 1974, p. 190). Where the real issue for the historian is "the truth" this only opens up a can of worms for librarians should they seek to resolve the historical with the philosophical impetus. In highlighting the resemblance between the stylistic means by which historians state their truth and how this resembles the truth that "novelists and poets employ to present their fictions" (190) Gay retraces the role of the epic poem as encyclopaedic trope (see also Rudy, 2014). In a sense, the assumption here is that historical truth is a species of fiction is telling. It is telling in the sense that it may help to reveal why it is so difficult for librarians to name the truth that is the definition of documentary knowledge. If it is nigh on impossible in the historical realm, what hope might there be for librarians to engage with philosophy, sociology or the sub-realms of philosophy of science or sociology of knowledge? Gay makes the poignant claim that it is "one of the proudest boasts of imaginative authors...that they are conveying truth through their work" (190). Aristotle's boast in the *Poetics* that poetry is truer than history, indeed a "more philosophical and a higher thing than history: for poetry tends to express the universal, history the particular" (Aristotle, trans., 1922, Part IX) is evidence that we are not necessarily trolling up a new theme.

While it is not difficult to see how the analogy of poetry and history align it is not right, according to Gay, to confuse the two as "intuitive divination might at times provide a

breathtaking shortcut to the truth, but never a substitute for the patient pursuit of causal connections or the rigorous text of scientific demonstration" (190). While truth is optional for fiction, as Gay notes and we all intuitively know, it is "an optional instrument"—there are the shackles of "probability and coherence" that demand the attention of the author writing fiction (or at least most of the time). License, rather than limits, is what really (and remarkably) demarcates fiction and documentary knowledge (Gay says history). Establishing character is "establishing contract" for Gay (191). How true this is but Gay points to how it is the transgression into reportage that oversteps the considerable mark given by audiences of this type of writing in their willingness to tolerate differences from expected norms. Gay's example of an author (for the example it is Solzhenitsyn) invading Stalin's mind "with a freedom that the historian can envy but not imitate" (192) is linked to how the "proofs..lie outside his fiction, in his readers' knowledge of history and human nature." Gay is perceptive enough to tell us what we think we already know but which at times escapes us in the strange brew of fictive and documentary writing that makes up out reading milieu; "free-floating truths emerge from a context of untruths...to make a story too probable...is to turn bad history into bad fiction" (192). The aficionados of documentary knowledge can take heart in knowing that lovers of fiction love it just as much for the lies it tells as much as for the truth it is purported to tell, as well (193). Gay notes Rebecca West's characteristically cynical summation that "A copy of the universe is not what is required of art; one of the damn things is ample" (194).

Mandelbaum's (1965, p. 205) investigation of Lovejoy's ongoing project, the History of Ideas, is useful to help us to understand what is the key materiel and what are the key considerations associated with "general problems of historiographical method" and how associated " 'special histories,' such as histories of philosophy, or of art, or of technology, or of law, are related to…paridigmatical cases of historical practice." Mandelbaum is concerned

with what these leave out. It is the general problems that need articulation to assist in coming

to grips with intellectual and cultural history—which is, of course, central to questions of non-

fiction or documentary knowledge. We need to take greater cognisance of how "particular

forms of specialised history differ in aim and in practice...how these various special histories

relate to what we may designate as 'general history'" (205). If we are permitted to extend

history, to allow it to act as a metonymical device for much of non-fiction, the untethered

concept that it is, then we might find a way through the reticence to name non-fiction as

knowledge—even if it is just as the underappreciated, and still very problematic, notion of

General Knowledge.

In Oakeshott's early work, modalities of experience are given importance in order to

ensure that the relationship between experience, and that by which it is defined, is made clear.

To not make these relationships clear is to, in Oakeshott's terminology, descend into

"irrelevance" (1966, p. 5). Keeping forms of experience separate is crucial if we are to avoid

"the errors and confusion, the irrelevance and cross-purpose, which follow from a failure to

determine the exact character and significance of (for example) scientific or historical

experience." Without such separation, we are bound to be led into

confusion, *ignoratio elenchi...* the most fatal of all errors… it occurs whenever argument or

inference passes from one world of experience to another, from what is abstracted upon one

principle to what is abstracted upon another, from what is abstract to what is concrete, and from

what is concrete to what is abstract. (Oakeshott, 1966, p. 5)

Non-fiction as an explanatory term fits the general frame of *ignoratio elenchi*—we wish

to explain what knowledge or truthful inquiry is and we choose to explain it by reference to a

negation of that which is not knowledge, that which is not true; non-fiction's worst

characteristic may just be this tendency to argue an irrelevant conclusion of the form

Q. What is knowledge?

 A. It is *not* imaginative fiction.

But this is a minor argument and Oakeshott's real insight is to show how in seeking to

understand experience as a whole what too often occurs is "a failure to take seriously the

criterion of satisfaction implied in the process" (70) because the "easily approachable" is

preferred to a more complex, complete type of understanding. The choice is a "coherent world

of concrete ideas" or a "restricted world of abstract ideas"[1] (70) and if we choose the latter we

are avoiding meeting our obligations to experience in the fullest understanding of the concept

To be satisfied with what a singular judgment, in which the subject is a proper name, can tell

us, is to have diverged from the concrete purpose in experience and to have taken up with

a purpose which is satisfactory because it appears to be what is required in experience.

(Oakeshott, 1966, p, 71)

The connection between experience and coherence is something we need to be aware of, so

In experience, what is ultimately satisfactory is a completely coherent world of ideas, and

whatever falls short of this can be explained fully only in terms of modification or abstraction,

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[1] Rescher points to how this type of tension manifests when "we concern ourselves with the relationships of the world's things to one another among themselves (*quoad se*) or with how they make an impact upon us (*quoad nos*). In our endeavours to come to cognitive terms with the world about us we correspondingly have at our disposal two very different modes of understanding based on two very different cognitive perspectives—the explanatorily causal and the affectively experiential" (1993, p. 155). Non-fiction as an explanatory concept arises as a problematic issue (or at least is maintained as such) when these issues are considered irresolvable.

in terms, that is, of the whole from which it diverges. And since abstraction (because it is thinking) is not merely selective omission, not merely a process in which experience falls short of its end, but also and always the construction of a separate world of ideas at the point of the arrest, since it is not merely separative, but also synthetic and integrative, a mode of experience is not merely an arrest in experience, but also the construction of a world of ideas at the point of the arrest. (Oakeshott, 1966, 73-74)

Oakeshott's modes of experience (historical, scientific and practical) is "experience with reservation...experience shackled by partiality and presupposition" and they are distinguished by "the entire world of ideas which these postulates (and therefore this arrest in experience) imply, call forth and maintain" (74).

Denotation and Intentionality

Makin's (2000) analysis of Bertrand Russell's sense of denotation is interesting in light of how modalities of experience impact and bring forth ideas. We need to be able to ascribe being as a part of a theory of descriptions as it allows us to recognise abstract entities, of which the subjects in non-fiction are, it just so happens, excellent examples. From being comes existence and Makin makes the two types of existence that are important to us here clear; they are the sense of "exist" that relates to having an occupancy of space and time (concrete existence) and the second sense of "exist" which is that which "is not applicable to individual things, and requires a class, or class concept, or propositional function for its meaningful application" (Makin, 2000, p. 56; see also Brown, 1968, p. 376). The sense of possible confusion relating what we denote as knowledge (Oakeshott's modes of experience is one example; Kelly (2014) is another) because of uncertainty as to what classes of experience exist,

essentially what we should agree matters, is a contributing factor to the inability to denote knowledge beyond the nugatory way use of the term non-fiction attempts to do.

While it is not especially new in LIS discourse to look at how theories of interpretation affect the way that the discipline is practiced (Budd, Buschman, Capurro, Fallis, Frohmann, Furner, Hansson, Hjørland are just a cross-section of scholars who are publishing in English), how theories of interpretation affect the use and deployment of the non-fiction concept is essentially untheorised. Skinner points out that the slow demise of empiricist epistemology (the "belief in sense data which are capable of being directly perceived and embodied in a noninterpretative observation language"), as a result of a tripartite attack from Quine, Kuhn, and Feyerabend, has helped to ensure that trying to "build up a structure of empirical knowledge on a basis purporting to be independent of our judgments" (1975, p. 209) has become largely discredited. While Skinner links the well-known hermeneuticists with the well-known members of the ordinary language school as sharing a similar commitment to pushing back the focus on empiricist method, what emerges from both is that the "notion of a text as a set of linguistic actions makes a certain sense of intentionality central to the business of interpretation," or, what is relevant is what the agent saw themselves as doing when they "issued the linguistic act" (212). Texts and associated actions (publishing and commentary on them, perhaps) are part of the writer's intentionality to mean something. Writers of documentary knowledge texts have an intention to mean something which is plainly not "this is not fiction" and, as a result, we carelessly tread on writers' toes when we treat their texts in such a way that the primary meaning for which they are written is, effectively, ignored (or at least ignored at the level of textual interpretation). It should seem straightforward that librarians should accommodate textual interpretation at the level of knowledge organisation but deference to simple tradition has meant that this has not been open to challenge. It should be. Tradition

is not a reasonable rationale to rely on in these circumstances. A scientific approach would ask what benefits accrue from knowledge being organised in non-academic contexts in this way and then assess, in turn, what problems arise as well.

The relationship between intentionality and rationality is taken up further by Føllesdal where explanation of what is meant by "directedness of the mental" (1986, p. 109) is given. While the rehabilitation of the concept from the schoolmen's ancient usage, through Brentano, involved the notion that "for each case of perception, there is some object *towards which* it is directed, *of* or *about* which it is," Husserl took it into a different realm. Not every mental phenomenon has an object so a more holistic approach would seek to understand "what mental phenomena is directed towards" (109) in order to better understand "what are the features of the mental thanks to which it is always as if it has an object" (109-110). Føllesdal points to how the collection of these features are Husserl's conception of *noema* or "generalised notion of meaning" (110).

Conclusion

Directedness characterising consciousness, in Føllesdal's interpretation of Husserl, involves "extrapolating beyond what meets the eye," and appreciating that the object has alternative faces (sides); it also has a history and a future—more than what we are simply perceiving in the here and now. The "consciousness of an object" is consciousness within "an extrapolated totality" (110) that is the world, according to Føllesdal. What follows, in Føllesdal's reading of the *noema* is the need to distinguish between our representation of the object *with* the object in relation to the surrounding world. Non-fiction's predicament as an object, like any other, situated in such a locus and subject to intentional consciousness and its partially disclosed noematic character, starts to become somewhat clearer if we treat it this

way. Føllesdal notes that the "object and the world are largely unknown" (110) and to a very large degree this is also the state of non-fiction. Both (i) why it is intended as non-fiction and (ii) how its possibilities for becoming more known are manifested are significantly discounted by the object-world-noema relationship it is predicated upon. It is not that there is outright ignorance of the world, that is not what is at stake, what is at stake is that while some of the features of the noema can be "precisely and firmly anticipated" others are only "anticipated in rough outline or not anticipated at all" (109). This leads to a model of noema that parallels many of the notions that we take for granted in non-fiction:

1.   "The world is regarded as containing lots of objects that we do not know about and
       perhaps have no inkling about."

2.   "Most of the properties of these objects and the relations between them are unknown."

3.   "Most of the properties of the object that we are presently focusing our attention on
       go beyond our anticipation." (Føllesdal, 110)

In Part Two, we will look to a set of further issues relating to the philosophical problem of fictionality; the notion of literary non-fiction; how an understanding of the concept of historicism is useful for describing documentary knowledge; the paradoxical nature of non-fiction and, finally, how ontic and epistemic factors help to define the paradigm.

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TITLE: Non-fiction: An Unnaturally Naturalised Concept

for Collection Development (Part 2)

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Abstract

Purpose: This paper seeks to problematise the basis of our use of non-fiction as an explanatory category in libraries that have mandates to deliver information to civil society users in order to initiate debate on its ongoing value.

Design/methodology/approach: A range of literature from the fields of information science, philosophy, literary studies and the sociology of knowledge was critically surveyed in order to uncover reasons for the use of the non-fiction concept when librarians are dealing with documentary knowledge. A process of thematisation of relevant material was then conducted utilising a methodology informed by historicist and hermeneutic- phenomenological approaches to social scientific inquiry.

Findings: While the concept of non-fiction has arguably been the single most influential "gift" of librarianship to other disciplines and to readers, the term's extreme simplicity masks a complex range of factors associated with common-sense understanding of life and our conceptualisation of what constitutes knowledge in civil society information environments. By masking the nature of questions associated with knowledge and documentary knowledge the non-fiction concept contributes to a restricted view of how these concepts interrelate.

Practical implications: Preliminary reasons are offered for why the non-fiction concept is problematic and an alternative discursive formation is put forward which may enable more fruitful caretaking of documentary collections in school and public libraries.

Originality/value: This paper helps to open the discussion among collection management theorists and practitioners regarding how the concept of documentary knowledge can be more usefully theorised so that it is better able to support the epistemic learning and socialisation goals of libraries characterised by their civil society setting.

PART 2

In Part One of this essay the problem of the non-fiction concept was introduced with reference to (i) how the differences in how we understand it and how we link it to concepts that pertain to common-sense understanding of life affect our conceptualisation of knowledge; (ii) the difficulties that we face when attempting to represent knowledge and ordinary life together; (iii) how we need to deal with questions of what knowledge and whose knowledge should be represented as non-fiction and how we should deal with tendencies to totalise the concept; (iv) how we face problems of indeterminacy, truth and worldview in defining an alternative category; (v) how historical and poetic experience can be revisioned as less incommensurable and how this promises a more sanguine association of science and humanistic literature and, finally; (vi) how the conceptual aids of denotation and intentionality offer promising guides to help those dealing with the problem of knowledge for a civil society setting to better deal with their obligations to represent knowledge as an amalgam of different interests and tendencies.

In Part Two, we look to the philosophical problem of fictionality; how we might approach and engage more honestly with a theory of literary non-fiction; the role of historicism in defining documentary knowledge; what is the effect of "the paradox of non-fiction" when it functions as the set of all sets of domain knowledge and how ontic and epistemic factors affect the construction of the non-fiction paradigm.

The Philosophical Problem of Fictionality

The "non-fiction error" is a problem only for those libraries that have been characterised elsewhere as civil society libraries (Kelly, 2014, 2015); it does not occur in academic or special libraries that do not hold fiction as part of their mandate. Non-fiction, as a concept mainly

perpetuated by librarians, primarily affects how isolated readers, defined as "that reader, from any culture, who reads independently of an academic interpretive community" (Travis, 1998, 85) deal with the world of documentary knowledge. It is worth looking into some theories of *not non-fiction* to help to contextualise why it is a drag on the development of independent readers.

Walton's phrase describing fictionality as being akin to "a prop in a game of make-believe" (1990, p. 71 *et passim*) is widely referenced in studies of fiction. Recent studies that deal with how we contextualise the make-believe elements in non-fiction include Smythe (2017) in psychology and Friend (2017) in philosophy. Fictionality, though, is not the same as the philosophical concept of fictionalism. The latter can be roughly defined as "the view that claims made within [a region of] discourse are not best seen as aiming at literal truth but are better regarded as a sort of 'fiction'" (Eklund, 2015, Introduction). Discussion of fictionalism leads some philosophers to try to understand the concept via eliminative materialism and how "the atomic sentences of the discourse are all untrue, either because the characteristic objects of the discourse do not exist—there are no numbers—or because its characteristic predicates are uninstantiated—nothing is right, good, etc." (Eklund, ibid, 3.1 Via eliminativist antirealism). Ramsey notes that we can locate an origin in Broad's *The Mind and its Place in Nature* (1925) in which pure materialism "that treats mental states as attributes that apply to nothing in the world" is rejected as "self-contradictory since it (presumably) presupposes the reality of misjudgements which are themselves a type of mental state" (Ramsey, 2013, 1. A Brief History).

So, is it right to see non-fiction as a mental state constitutive of an attribute that applies to nothing in the world, and is it self-contradictory, as well, due to some version of a

presupposed misjudgement? It seems reasonable to say that it is: we assume there is a class of things that are subsumed within the class non-fiction, we can say as well that there is no way of defining that class (an oft-quoted example would be: Is the concept Sherlock Holmes *only* fiction?). We make a misjudgement if we look at the class of things subsumable as non-fiction as entities that are constituted by their not being fictional entities. Discussion of Sherlock Holmes in books that are not by Doyle, in a sense, proves the claim. But eliminative materialism has more interesting connotations. Eliminative materialism asks us to look carefully at how we accommodate "mental concepts" with "mental state terms referring to nothing that actually exists" (Ramsey, 1. A Brief History). This is preferable to the type of paraphrasing used in analytic philosophy to remove unwanted ontological commitment and—for purposes of logical analysis—to reduce sentences of a fictional nature to a normative form through paraphrasing. Eliminative materialists, according to Ramsey, have tended to offer a physical explanation of mental states. In effect, they are in this view, simply brain states and the understanding of them is a reduction to versions of the physical understanding. To be more specific is helpful here and as Ramsey's examples of demons and germs make clear, the former we no longer credit as a category, the latter we do but only in a folk psychology sort of way.

The view that is most acceptable as it relates to our view of non-fiction here is that a weak form of eliminative materialism can be deployed to defend the premise "that certain common-sense mental states, such as beliefs and desires, do not exist," (Ramsey, 1. A Brief History) specifically, that there is no corresponding entity as is believed in the engagement with the term non-fiction. The entity is not real because it is (i) not semantically reasonable and (ii) because it is simply one of many categories that no longer have situational worth. Just as knowledge of the classes of demons (an entity we no longer credit with real existence) is now simply a knowledge of fictional entities, so knowledge of the class of non-fiction ought to have

a similar status. It lacks situational worth, it has no category of real existence and this should be enough to cast doubt on the efficacy of non-fiction as an explanatory category worth maintaining. Just as eliminative materialism's iconoclastic approach to folk psychology acts as an exemplar within broader ontologies of the real, non-fiction's tendency to define itself as an explanatory category with many of the same characteristics of a discredited folk psychology operates as a particular case in point. It was never a useful category for readers within an interpretive community and it is not worth rehabilitating in the school or public library settings it has colonised.

Smythe makes it clear that "the distinction between fiction and non-fiction that has become broadly consensual in the philosophical literature is cast, not in terms of factual content but, rather, with respect to different standards for the production, appreciation and evaluation of works" (2017, p. 2). While non-fiction is evaluated "in terms of standards of evidence and argument that go beyond the works themselves, works of fiction warrant their own assertions" (2). Smythe makes the significant point that the distinction between fiction and non-fiction is not an absolute one

Fictionality, like factuality, is a matter of degree. A prosaic scientific treatise would possess relatively little fictionality, for example, whereas a narrative history, to the extent that it employs techniques of imaginative storytelling, would have more…fictionality and factuality are not mutually exclusive categories but, rather, orthogonal dimensions along which works of both fiction and nonfiction may vary widely. (Smythe, 2017, p. 3)

While the focus here is mainly on understanding fiction, it is useful to see that the notion of a polarity between fiction and other writing is not stamped in the consciousness of many

commentators. It would be reasonably straightforward to assume that few librarians with a deep knowledge of fiction see it this way as well (see Lea (2016), for a discussion on the socio-linguistic differences and how the polarity is not running through all societies in the same way). Smythe explains how

unlike the factual worlds of nonfictional discourse or the possible worlds of modal logic, fictional worlds have no independent existence apart from the discourse that creates them. The imaginative prescriptions of authors, together with the penumbra of background assumptions they invoke, serve to constitute fictional worlds rather than to represent independently existing realities. (Smythe, 2017, p. 6)

In the context of how fiction operates as a "relatively unconstrained…field of reference" Smythe (6) also cites *The Nature of Fiction* (1990, p. 91) where Currie notes that "when it comes to truth in fiction there is no distinguishing an epistemic from an ontological difference." The issue that both Smythe and Currie see as important is that reality is an important place to demarcate, and to patrol, and that there are consequences for too-easily retreating from its defence.

Friend describes how "non-fiction narratives invite us to imagine 'worlds' just as much as fictions do" (2017, p. 31) and that working with a construction she calls the Reality Assumption—"the assumption that everything that is (really) true is also fictionally the case, unless excluded by the work"—what is important to understand is "the content that is mentally represented...rather than the attitude we take toward it" (29). It would seem felicitous within the general approach outlined here (towards a less bifurcated collection philosophy) to travel with Friend's Reality Assumption a little further and to see how its focus on the shadowed area,

between fact and fiction, provides a clue to what may be needed to couple them, if not back together, then in a more appropriate way.

Friend claims that "non-fiction stories clearly invite readers to form mental representations of what they are about" and that "if what is fictional is what is so according to a work of fiction, this should not differ in kind from what is so according to a work of non-fiction" (31). The point of this type of claim is not immediately clear but it becomes more so when "we take the non-fiction to be inaccurate" and Friend's example is that

the most hardened atheist recognises that, according to Augustine's *Confessions*, God exists. Even with accurate works we assume a comparison between what is so according to the story and what is actually so, indicating that we have an independent grasp on the former...what is the case according to a story, whether fiction or non-fiction, is *storified*. (Friend, 2017, p. 31)

Some analytic philosophers, such as John Searle, have been refreshingly frank in acknowledging their reticence to analyse literature (which is how he describes non-fiction minus science) in this storified way. Searle bases his claim initially on the belief that "there is no trait or set of traits which all works of literature have in common and which could constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for being a work of literature" and follows this up with locating literature in "a set of attitudes we take toward a stretch of discourse, not a name of an internal property of the stretch of discourse" (1975, p. 320). This second reason is clarified through recourse to the argument that "why we take the attitudes we do…[is] in part a function of the properties of the discourse and not entirely arbitrary" and that the quality of literariness is a reader's decision. Searle's final argument for not being able to analyse literature is that "the literary is continuous with the non-literary...there is not much of a boundary at all" (320).

To be within a storified state is part of the experience of all narrative and the distinctions while real are not petrified, they have the potential to be softened as the need arises. The need does arise in the context of demystifying documentary knowledge for the independent reader and for helping to ensure that the perspectives on it are not framed in ways that do not promote misrepresentations of science and literature studies as naturally and eternally separate areas of inquiry, narrative and enjoyment.

Dealing Adequately with a Theory of Literary Non-fiction

Just as we should engage with theories of fictionality so as to better understand how we have come to the current non-fiction paradigm, we also need to attempt to understand the types of works that fit within documentary knowledge and which have a shared ontology with imaginative writing. Heyne (1987) asks us to consider (i) what is it for non-fiction narrative to be literary and (ii) why get caught up with the differences with fiction and non-fiction and the relationship of either to literature? While we might take up Zavarzadeh's (2006) notion of "fictuality" as an antidote to such problems, is it not more likely that discursive blending is just adding to the problem of a poorly conceived documentary knowledge? According to Heyne, Zavarzadeh approaches the non-fiction novel "as a narrative balanced between the two directions, with no final allegiance to either the inner or the outer world"; the approach works with "the difficulty people have making decisions about truth" (Heyne, 484). Zavarzadeh's view incorporates sympathy for how "every narrative is a version [without there always being] firm principles for judging all versions, nor enough information available to make satisfying decisions about representational accuracy." This leads to the necessary conclusion that it is necessary to "abandon the fact/fiction distinction in the face of increasingly complex modes of telling applied to an increasing amount of information" (484).

Heyne refigures the debate by standing by the well-honed view, against Zavarzadeh, that

we commonly depend on distinguishing between fact and fiction, employing our "factual competence"...We will continue to maintain the fact/fiction distinction at least as long as we find it worthwhile to conduct a collective search for the truths of our past. (Heyne, 1987, p. 484)

It is views like this that need to win the day when we look to the broader situation our documentary knowledge collections face. Heyne's analysis is particularly helpful in that it opens us to questions such as how "we can usefully talk about accuracy and meaning as different sorts of claims or strategies in nonfiction narrative" (486); how "literary nonfiction creates absorbing, convincing patterns from the material of verifiable facts" (487); and how

recognising that we are students of human constructions shaped by human purposes need not make us afraid to talk about truth. We make decisions every day based on our evaluations of competing versions of reality. Just because we are without absolute rules universally accepted for the construction of accurate or meaningful narrative, we do not have to conclude that therefore we cannot claim that one story is truer than another. We just have to be careful, look at specific cases, and make explicit the standards by which we are judging truth....Another virtue of this theory is that it strives for a shared understanding of the nature of texts that serve multiple functions in society. (Heyne, 1987, p. 489)

The Role of Historicism in Defining Documentary Knowledge

Hamilton points to how Macaulay's belief that history is sometimes fiction, sometimes theory, is symptomatic of the compromise historians will often need to make in their attempt

to "find their own ways of making the possible and the probable interact, balancing truth to the facts against the need for those facts to make sense" (1996, p. 9). In a sense, this is helpful advice in overcoming the problem of naming knowledge. What is missing with the refusal to name knowledge in school and public libraries is a chance to compromise on the definition of knowledge. Bringing the concept of historicism to bear in librarian training in collection management offers the chance to help make clear "the prime importance of historical context to the interpretation of texts of all kinds" and how historicism is, in effect, a "reaction to the practice of deducing from first principles truths about how people are obliged to organise themselves socially and politically" (2). It is these latter concerns that largely create the problems with defining knowledge (as the physical and natural sciences are accepted as knowledge in all but the most recalcitrant of social settings).

Historicism is not simply historical understanding for the historically inclined mind but is a movement seeking to go beyond universal applicability toward a "model for apprehending social and cultural diversity different from the scientific, law-governed paradigm of the Enlightenment" (2). We cannot understand this, according to Hamilton, without reference to the individualist-Romanticist metaphysic which is, in turn, a hermeneutic "recasting" of

aesthetic heritage in order to show that history, properly understood, demonstrates that we can have a kind of knowledge complementing the natural sciences, and that all experience not falling under scientific jurisdiction need not be consigned to a non-cognitive aesthetic which lays no claim to being true. (Hamilton, 1996, p. 3)

Hamilton asks us to consider the relationship between the "critical heritage of a text" and more general questions of relativism (what really is true)—this is the question that relates to how (i)

meaning for an original audience relates to (ii) any subsequent claims of putative real meaning which can (iii) only be an ideological construction in any final summation. Hamilton asks how when "modernity itself is defined by the idea that we can break from the past by claiming to be the measure of all things...that this subjectivity is not an embarrassment for science but the grounds of its possibility" (4). The non-fiction concept, clearly, does not engage with these issues sufficiently.

Hamilton's discussion of historicism acknowledges how "philosophers have been eager to separate history from fiction" but that "this disciplinary boundary proved fragile from the start" (7). Plato, as is well-known, sought to expel poets from his republic and, as Hamilton makes clear, needed to resort to myth for "descriptions of the ultimate truth of philosophy" (7). In both the Allegory of the Cave and the Myth of Er "the contradictory recourse to art of a philosopher who has just condemned art as intellectually and morally disreputable implicates history in fiction" (7). The mythic basis for "true stories" has an analogical relationship to the construction of documentary knowledge as *not fiction*. According to Hamilton, Plato needed myth to convey the messages built into his philosophy; his myths "aspire to be history" but, lacking facts, Hamilton claims they "must resort to fictions" (7)—how do we imagine the need to convey a realm of *Forms* to human beings who operate capably in a natural attitude, albeit a natural attitude that lacks inherent skills for linking concepts with perception?

Just as there is no easy way to (pre-scientifically) explain the "epistemological status of the objects of cognitive attention" (Malcolm, 1962, p. 44) or knowledge attained through dialectic (43), Plato uses analogy in the form of myth to make his point about how we are, generally, often wanting intellectually (we are only ever partially knowledgeable) and rarely can link *Forms* (actual objects) to variations of thought and opinion (as we should). Librarians

have also, platonically, resorted to making the difficult explanation of what is knowledge something analogical as well—knowledge is not what we find in stories but we need the story to help us understand ourselves—Knowledge *is* Non-fiction.

Linking *Forms* to thought and opinion is a difficult undertaking, just as is saying what is it about *Forms* that makes up knowledge. Just as in the Allegory of the Cave where Plato's central character, the shackled man who only sees shadows of the real world displayed on the wall of his cave (and not the objects and persons making the shadows) and is returned to the world of reality, turns towards *more real things* (πρὸς μᾶλλον ὄντα), we can return our conception of knowledge to a place inhabited by real beings and not shadows of knowledge as well. Putting historicism to work for documentary knowledge in school and public libraries involves trying to understand how "the particularity of historical event and artwork fixes them in time yet opens them up to a mode of explanation which changes over time" (Hamilton, 18). This helps us to understand why the topics of documentary knowledge in 1900 were so very different in 2000. While the nuance of natural science is readily understandable with the simple assertion "we discovered new things" it is not so easily communicated, or apparent, that within humanistic knowledge and social science "we interpreted new things" or "people have changed."

The Paradox of Non-fiction When It Functions as the Set of All Sets

When the topicality of non-fiction coalesces as a set, the set of all topics that are non-fiction, it encounters a paradox. It is necessary to explain this in some detail before dealing with the paradox. We have discussed how the description *non-fiction* is both true and untrue; specifically, it is true in the surface meaning of the term but is false in terms of the delusion that knowledge can be defined by reference to the fabulistic. In the context of how paradox

makes us work harder for explanations, and specifically in the cross-disciplinary sense alluded to here, Major (2014, p. 54) points to how paradox's contradictions might be viewed as "trivial or nonsensical" but they may lead to a "powerful insight." Russell's Paradox, developed from Russell's attempt to refute Cantor's mathematical assertion related to set theory, *viz.* that there is no greatest number and "applying it to 'large' classes such as the universal class...and the class of all classes" (Coffa, 1979, p. 32), creates a paradox of the form "Does the set of all sets which do not contain themselves contain itself?"

We must adopt a similar mindset when we are backed into a corner and asked to agree that non-fiction is the set of all non-fiction topics that are not fiction. Is non-fiction in the set we notate as non-fiction? The contradiction is less perplexing than annoying but is, nevertheless, real enough. As far as the claimed paradox is concerned, the problem is not in the terminology as the same result would emerge if "non-fiction" was replaced with "knowledge." What is needed is a circuit breaker. Interestingly enough, Russell's Paradox is sometimes illustrated by the example of the Librarian's Paradox which highlights the problem of a book-form catalogue that is one of a library's books. On its own it need not include itself—it is what it is—but if it is sent to a union catalogue it might need to be added to a class of catalogues that do not include itself (some catalogues we assume have listed themselves while being a book in their library). What then of the union catalogue that attempts to list all catalogues that do not list themselves? If it lists itself it has included itself in the other category. In order to overcome the type of paradox of self-referentiality described here Russell introduced a type theory that was based on functionalisation. While the mathematics is not relevant here, the analogy to modern knowledge organisation is. To overcome the paradox of self-referentiality in representing *knowledge-an infinite number of topics*, or *documentary knowledge-a very large number of topics*, we must look to what the purpose of the knowledge set is and how it operates

in either mind or reality (or possibly both). Abbas, Baker, Huskey and Weaver posit a straightforward form of domain analysis that serves to advance the design of information representation and provides the type of structure necessary to move beyond ineffectual construction of knowledge in the school or public library; they advocate "1) empirical user studies, paired with 2) document and genre studies and 3) epistemological and critical studies" (2016, p. 4). Such an approach offers a way out of the non-fiction maze by allowing the formative learner or the civil society reader to be assessed as having a relationship to knowledge/documentary-knowledge which is unique, but also, socially dependant in line with a range of assumptions about tradition molding the hermeneutic horizon. Studies of document and genre have been touched upon here already but approaches such as that advocated by Hartel (2003) in studies of leisure reading—which draw from Savolainen's (1995) focus on information seeking in everyday life contexts and Hjørland's (2002) diverse approaches to domain analysis—are informed by a commitment to *subject as genre with unique documentary qualities*. Such an approach exemplifies both a hermeneutic orientation and sensitivity to the place of documentary knowledge within a historicist narrative.

Ontic and Epistemic Factors Affecting the Construction of the Non-fiction Paradigm

Kogler helps to provide a guide on how to escape the quasi-antinomy of non-fiction by pointing to how the meaning of a symbolic expression (such as our concerns here—a collection designation) is "linguistically articulated" and "defined by its intentional relation to a subject matter" (2011, p. 341). Kogler's analysis can assist librarians who face problems with interpretation of *what knowledge is* in their social domain understand that they need to "address what is said" in the potential texts that they include, and look to what the "intended object or '*die Sache selbst*' [the thing itself]," the domain knowledge, refers to. While this is by no means straightforward it cannot be done apart from an attempt to access the subject matter of the text

with reference to one's own "beliefs and assumptions" about it. As a result, (i) drawing on one's preunderstanding of what knowledge is in general and what domain knowledges comprise *in the particular*, and (ii) working with the idea that there "can never be a pure or unmediated representation of text's perspective on the subject matter at stake," is an entirely adequate strategy. Rather than throwing up one's hands at the enormity of the task, interpretive understanding of knowledge and domain knowledge should be seen as always having "to emerge from the 'fusion' of the 'horizons' that are invested in the encounter with the text—a text which poses the challenge to understand what it says about something" (341). What is said here about "the text" applies equally to the domain.

In a sense, overcoming the problem with contextualising documentary knowledge in school and public libraries is a part of the project of defining what it is to pursue a critical-hermeneutic archaeology of knowledge, as Kogler attempts to do. Central to this is showing why "a meaning theory based on the direct observation of objects or behaviour is untenable" (342). It would seem reasonable to make the connection that the inability to properly contextualise knowledge and documentary knowledge in certain library environments emerges in the wake of the growth of early twentieth-century positivism. Kogler is aligned with the likes of Bernstein (1983) and Hekman (1986) in asking us to consider how "the shared meaning of linguistic terms cannot be grounded in an extra-linguistic, allegedly objective stance of pure observation" (*i.e.*, physics is physics because I am a physicist and I know what physics is) and how "an ontology based on natural objects cannot be the ground for understanding social agency" (*i.e.*, there is a thing called physics which I believe to be real and it is the sharing of this belief with others who share much the same belief as me that allows us to discuss physics). Alternatives to these examples would be, respectively: (i) physics is physics because many people over time have agreed what physics is, and also, (ii) many people have disagreed about

what physics is, its definition has changed and may continue to change and there is a linguistically mediated domain of knowledge that is not a real object per se, but is a social construction. What we might call objective facts (the information that we obtain through empirical and inductive methods, that have been demonstrated to be falsifiable and have high degrees of veridicality) needs to be seen in light of how we attribute meaning to this information; it is historically formed, and is not merely a function of a single correctly formed reason (Feyerabend, 1974).

Kogler focuses on how human agency supports this historically informed meaning schema, how an "intelligible notion of human action presupposes a particular set of concepts including intentionality, norms, institutions, and language" (343) and how this supports understanding of "what it means to act rationally" as well as how "reason-based action must be grounded in socially shared practices" to be able to have an effect *in the world* and to be intelligible beyond a merely solipsistic, or physicalist, sense of what it means to think and act. For Kogler, "only an interpreter capable of understanding intentional as well as normative concepts and practices can make sense of the concepts and practices he or she encounters" and this dynamic interplay between the intentional (*sc.* the "essential property of ... being directed onto something is *not* contingent upon whether some real physical target exists independently of the intentional act itself" [Jacob, 2014, Intentional inexistence]) and an act's *being* intentional "depends only on its content, and an act's content is independent of the existence of anything external to the act...different contents can give acts the character of being directed toward the same object, although those contents will represent the object differently" (McIntyre and Smith, 1989, p. 156,). Librarians dealing with the complexity of knowledge have to think through the concepts of objective knowledge for themselves as well as filtering this through a normative sieve. Glüer and Wikforss (2015, 1.1 Metaphysical Questions), in their discussion

of the normativity of meaning and content point to how "to say that meaning/content is essentially normative is making a claim about the nature of meaning/content…there is no meaning/content without norms."

Atmanspacher and Primas point to how interpretation mixes ontic and epistemic elements, especially in a scientific theory where "the theory on the one hand and elements of the domain of reality for which the theory is designed on the other" both come in to play in a "relation of reference" which is never self-contained in the scientific discipline (2003, p. 304). At some level, "genuinely philosophical issues must be taken into account." A part of this is to distinguish "epistemological and ontological statements"—the ontological is a form of metaphysics while epistemology includes "all kinds of issues related to the knowledge (or ignorance) of information gathering and using systems." While ontology is metaphysical it is, nonetheless, concerned with systemic issues "independent of any empirical access." It is preferable to look at "epistemic and ontic states of a system"[2] as epistemic and ontic states (taken together) can be an epistemological or an ontological matter. Atmanspacher and Primas argue that "epistemic and ontic states of a system...might be understood ontologically" just as "epistemic and ontic descriptions...might be understood epistemologically" (304). If we look to the analogy with knowledge in libraries we might say that in order to explain it in any sort of meaningful way we have to approach the task as one involved with engaging with a system state (all documentary knowledge) capable of epistemic description (a collection of documentary knowledge for a reading community). The result is an epistemic state which is, theoretically, able to be represented in a mathematical form that in Atmanspacher and Primas's terminology "encodes empirically obtainable knowledge" (305). Such a state "depend[s] on

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[2] Floridi (2013) discusses the notion of "ontic trust" as a notion of respect for information objects. While we might not agree with Floridi's overall thrust, it is helpful in improving how we engage with knowledge/documentary-knowledge as a kind of fund of subject entities and related facts worthy of consideration.

observation and measurement" but will also, importantly, "introduce a context under which a system is investigated." This means that the "properties associated with an epistemic state are *contextual*" and "general fundamental principles cannot be expected" (305). So, if we take a representation of knowledge, such as the RLG Conspectus, as an example of the system state, our gradations of relevance for our audiences are types of epistemic descriptions of epistemic states.

But this is not the only way we can approach this type of activity. We have ontic descriptions and ontic states as well which, Atmanspacher and Primas maintain, undertake a more exhaustive representation. Rather than refer to a summary of knowledge (such as RLG Conspectus), looking toward the ontic state involves thought and evaluation of how something, in this case knowledge, is "'just the way it is,' without any [direct] reference to epistemic knowledge or ignorance." For Atmanspacher and Primas, ontic states are "empirically inaccessible" and the properties they describe are "*intrinsic* properties." Their connection to individual situated agents is plain and they rely primarily on principles of universal validity, such as the ability to read and write to engage in complex discourse, or the ability to manipulate numbers and symbols to calculate and engage in geometrical representation and measurement. Such principles also pertain to common sense and regular human action in the world. An example might be that we access ontic states and undertake an ontic description of knowledge when we (albeit carefully) include information on poisons in a collection of knowledge for school students. School students and poisons are not epistemically related in terms of knowledge in the same way that school students and national history or geography might be, but it is certainly a topic that one would expect that they should be informed of. Similarly, while most members of a community have little interest in the mechanics of law and legislation,

it seems intrinsically worthwhile that they can avail themselves of significant parts of this area of knowledge, should they choose to do so.

Ontic principles, if we can call them that, "are assumed to be quite universally valid, and they are used to provide a description of the material world which is as context independent as possible or reasonable" (305). There is no need to rely on epistemic states when the primacy of an ontic state can be argued. The two are not mutually exclusive, of course. As Atmanspacher and Primas make clear

to the same degree to which ontic descriptions are context-independent, they hide the richness and variety of empirical reality....Patterns are detected and recognised by rejecting information which is selected as irrelevant in particular contexts. Based on such contexts, *an epistemic state refers to the knowledge that can be obtained about an ontic state*. (Atmanspacher & Primas 2003, p. 305)

When we are representing knowledge in a school or public library we should be aware of how we bring both the ontic state of knowledge, which "typically exhibit[s] high degrees of symmetry (and corresponding formal simplicity and transparency)" together with epistemic frameworks—our complex higher-order disciplinary and domain knowledges which "require broken symmetries in order to describe the multitude and complexity of properties in the world of empirical facts" (Atmanspacher, 2017, p. xi). When we face such a situation we need to look to deliberation as a strategy so as to move beyond notions of rationality and its correlates of certainty and truth or even of "the possession of an algorithm which allows us to move necessarily from one body of information to another" (Brown, 1978, p. 245). Brown argues quite persuasively that we generally operate with a model of rationality that backs our

disciplinary deliberations, and while this might seem too broad a claim, the point is that those who lack disciplinary information are often considered "not competent to make a rational determination" (246). Brown, while arguing that when lacking disciplinary competence one necessarily cannot formulate a "rational belief in that discipline" owing to the inability to "deliberate about the relevant information," also makes the distinction that those in such a position can though "come to a rational belief about what is currently held in a discipline on the basis of information about what practitioners of that discipline believe" (246). This is substantially correct and offers another way forward, past the roadblock that librarians cannot (or will not) say what knowledge is.

Conclusion

Librarians do not have to have the ability to deliberate about the information that makes up various disciplinary knowledges and this has led to a reticence to say anything at all about knowledge. The view that is advanced here contends that they *do* need to be able to come to a rational belief about what is being said in these disciplines. It seems uncontroversial to make the point that the level at which these deliberations need to be made in school and public libraries is not particularly research intensive, nor will it demand significant prior training. Librarians' information searching and questioning skills should be able to make up for specific gaps in disciplinary training for simple contextuality purposes. Built into this allowance, this information literacy if you will, is the need however for a type of practical wisdom which requires a commitment to developing broad topical knowledge across a range of semi-specialised areas throughout their careers.

Using the non-fiction concept as a way out of dealing with these problems has long since ceased to be an acceptable means to avoid the knowledge/documentary-knowledge

conundrum. Facing up to the problem will help change the way future generations conceive of documentary knowledge. Quietly retiring the word *non-fiction* from our collection development vocabulary is a good first step in improving this ongoing relationship between people and the rich history of ideas that is everyone's patrimony.

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